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VOLUME

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VOLUME ONE

THE OTHER HARMONY

The Collected Poetry of ELI MANDEL

EDITED BY ANDREW STUBBS AND JUDY CHAPMAN

100-07465/

The Other Harmony

The Collected Poetry of Eli Mandel

— VOLUME 1 —

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— VOLUME 1 —

edited by
Andrew Stubbs
and
Judy Chapman

CANADIAN PLAINS RESEARCH CENTER
2000

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Canadian Plains Research Center
University of Regina
Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0A2
Canada
Tel: (306) 585-4758
Fax: (306) 585-4699
e-mail: canadian.plains@uregina.ca
http://www.cprc.uregina.ca

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Mandel, Eli, 1922–1992.

The other harmony : the collected poetry of Eli Mandel

(University of Regina publications, ISSN 1480-0004 ; 6)

Includes index.
ISBN 0-88977-138-3

I. Stubbs, Andrew James. II. Chapman, Judy Lea, 1954–
III. University of Regina. Canadian Plains Research Center.
IV. Title. V. Series.

PS8526.A52 A17 2000 C811'.54 C00-920144-0
PR9199.3.M347 A17 2000

Cover Design: Donna Achtzehner, Canadian Plains Research Center.
Cover Photo: Don Hall, University of Regina.

Photos for *Out of Place* (pages 235 to 300) courtesy of Ann Mandel.
All other photos taken near Estevan, Saskatchewan, by Don Hall, University of Regina.

Printed and bound in Canada by
Houghton Boston, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Printed on acid-free paper

I'd been away for a long time and I was back. No, I hadn't been away for a long time, but I was back, and suddenly it was all just the light that we could see out here now, this incredible Prairie light and everything comes in it…

Interview with Eli Mandel, March 16, 1978 by David Arnason, Dennis Cooley, and Robert Enright
Essays on Canadian Writing (Numbers 18/19, Summer/Fall 1980), 85-86.

at a correction line
he reads the wind's grammar

rhetoric falls from trees

in a simple sentence of land
a disappointed syntax

Eli Mandel, "Saskatchewan Surveyor"

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FOREWORD

The Other Harmony: The Collected Poetry of Eli Mandel brings together the eight major books of poetry, and the prose journals of *Life Sentence*, that Eli Mandel published between 1954 and 1981. Volume 1 includes the standard canon (*Trio*, 1954; *Fuseli Poems*, 1960; *Black and Secret Man*, 1964; *An Idiot Joy*, 1967; *Stony Plain*, 1973; *Out of Place*, 1977; and *Life Sentence*, 1981), as well as the final version of *Mary Midnight* (1979), Mandel's "Oratory" based on Christopher Smart. Note that the *Out of Place* photographs by Ann Mandel presented here differ slightly, in terms of selection and arrangement, from the original book version. In some cases, original photographs are no longer available; however, we welcomed the opportunity to present other pictures from Ann's collection.

Volume 2 includes two selected editions of Eli Mandel's poems, *Crusoe* (1973) and *Dreaming Backwards* (1981). Since these contain revised versions of earlier works, they are published here in their entirety. Some of these revisions are substantial, others relatively slight, but given the range of changes Mandel made it has seemed appropriate to regard both books as artistic units. Also included is a group of poems Mandel (as "E.W. Mandel") contributed to *Third Person Singular*. The exact date of this publication—which was printed in Saskatoon and, *Trio*-style, featured work by two other poets—is not clear, though signs are it appeared between 1946 and 1950 when Mandel was a student at the University of Saskatchewan. (The change to "Eli Mandel," prompted by Louis Dudek in the Contact Press years, was announced with *Black and Secret Man*.)

The University of Manitoba's Eli Mandel Archives contain numerous hitherto unpublished poems, along with poems that saw magazine publication but were not included in any collection. A selection of this work, which is mostly undated, is included in Volume 2, in keeping with the overall purpose of this project, which is to make Mandel's work available to a wide contemporary audience. Mandel, retrospectively, valued much of this material highly and would have approved of its gaining a readership. Fascinated by patterns of doubling, by repetition, he returned to earlier writing frequently for ideas—or to rework it—so it can be appreciated for itself and as a tributary to the main current of his poetic thought. We are grateful to Ann Mandel for her insight and guidance in assembling this material.

One of the windfalls of our various journeys through the Archives was finding handwritten notes on a number of manuscript pages that cast light on images, symbols, and allusions in Mandel's poetry or give anecdotal background on its process of composition. A choice of these notes is appended here in the hope that it will assist in the reading of particular poems or suggest patterns running through Mandel's entire opus. In the course of preparing this collection we met many individuals who generously offered information about the places and times Eli Mandel moved through. We have reproduced some of this lore as comments—also in the "Notes" section. This commentary aims to be neither exhaustive nor formal; in some cases we thought it helped establish connections between the poet and his world—especially the south Saskatchewan of his early years, to which he returned, imaginatively and literally, many times.

— Judy Chapman and Andrew Stubbs

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was made possible through the generous support of:
Cultural Industries Development Fund (Saskatchewan)
University of Regina President's Fund
Reference Staff of the Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba
Reference Staff of the University of Regina Library
Reference Staff of the Regina Public Library
Beth Jacob Synagogue

We would like to thank the following for their invaluable contributions at various stages in the preparation of this book: Conny Ratt, our indefatigable research assistant; Leslie Chapman, for timely assistance along the way; Jack Chapman and Peggy Chapman, for lore, memories, bridge building.

The support of Brian Mlazgar and Donna Achtzehner of Canadian Plains Research Center has been constant and generous.

We are grateful to Ann Mandel for her knowledge, guidance, and encouragement throughout the project.

COLLECTED POETRY

TRIO

Minotaur Poems

I

It has been hours in these rooms,
the opening to which, door or sash,
I have lost. I have gone from room to room
asking the janitors who were sweeping up
the brains that lay on the floors,
the bones shining in the wastebaskets,
and once I asked a suit of clothes
that collapsed at my breath and bundled
and crawled on the floor like a coward.
Finally, after several stories,
in the staired and eyed hall,
I came upon a man with the face of a bull.

II

My father was always out in the garage
building a shining wing, a wing
that curved and flew along the edge of blue air
in that streamed and sunlit room
that smelled of oil and engines
and crankcase grease, and especially
the lemon smell of polish and cedar.
Outside there were sharp rocks, and trees,
cold air where birds fell like rocks
and screams, hawks, kites, and cranes.
The air was filled with a buzzing and flying
and the invisible hum of a bee's wings was honey
in my father's framed and engined mind.
Last Saturday we saw him at the horizon
screaming like a hawk as he fell into the sun.

III

They chose among us in the fall of the year,
by lot, behind fierce masks designed of sign
to ward off the imminent descent of the sun people;
someone talked of a dying god, as if
the young ones among us believed in that
any more, others cautioned us against the voices
we were always supposed to hear and these
were stubborn about the women crying.
I remembered the face of the one who brought me here
when they drew my name in the hall,
it was her persuasions in the beginning,
something about fathers.
                                        Like the others, before this
I saw only their breasts that appeared on the walls,
legs moving in unison, the swaying of sweat-stained
bodies and their half closed eyes:
all the talk about signs when I knew
the boys were only waiting for the time
when the women undressed, as they always did,
                                        snickering
in those same fields that make a dawn in vision
where birds begin to live in rocks and screams.
It is hard to feel free of accusation
because of eyes
although there is a difference between revelation
and action bellied into life, between
believing in voices
and knowing the chances that we have to take.

IV

Now I am dressed in a multitude of rooms
like a Chinese box, and slip from covers
into covers   Dawn will not help me nor
the day's exposure   I am a prodigious pun
to hide and show myself between these walls
this otherwise where sunlight
dressed in a tweed suit pursues me
or a stranger in the rooms
            and footfalls on the stairs
and eyes   and over all
     the whispering and chattering of the walls
          the pipes and hammered arteries of the place.

Is that a revelation in a field of light
competing with a shadow on the rock?
A bird's shadow seen from here?
Or a cloud between the sky and land
footed and patterned into phrases?

It is hours since I have been in here.
If I had once seen anything
except birds,
rocks, land, and all winter long
                              the ice and snow.

V

Within these walls I am to look for light
Or hold an abstract in my hand as firm
As apples or the golden bar the older men
Returned to us. Remember that. That spring
There were those crowds and crowds below the cliffs
This side of town and all along the beach,
Flags out, booths filled with toys, and one,
The better salesman of the lot, a beggar
From the north had miniatures of bars
That went like hotcakes. Fleece for the crowd.
A replica to keep you as it kept our men
This winter past. Then noise, flocks wheeling overhead,
The painted ship, a bauble on the sea, came like a toy
To harbour.

And the tall bronzed men descended
Between the cheers and speeches at the harbour mouth,
Talk about campaigns in lands we'd never heard of,
Cheers and lewd remarks and laughter, the look
In other eyes, and counting of the crew
And stooping at the gaps aghast.
That was another death, the shock in surf,
The rock's point of view, the hawk
Momentarily composing before the fall
His target of a landscape from the sky.
The trailing plume before the dark.
Night on the beach and smoke
from the new charred campfires.

VI

Orpheus

The Welshman by the pit whose Sabbath voice
Would set the week to peace, or end a day,
Picked over coal and said he knew within
The inside of our god, his transformation
Out of tree, the face in black, faced out of coal,
Stamped on the walls he picked. His useful metaphor,
He said, the pit shaped underneath him into black
And pitied words that moved the leaves or sang
Together flocks, or shook the dull and herded animals.
His pity also took between the rocks
Some still alive who saw the black and second
Hand that clawed them, and he mocked in Welsh
Whatever shades fell back, and cursed and sang
Back to their second death those grave ghosts.

Who found his body and who found his head
And who wiped god from off his eyes and face?

Joy of Conquest

When Mark arrived with Abel in the town
His scalded brain was hidden in his head.
And fine and brainless Abel set it down
That we should welcome Mark to Lily's bed.

When Lily in her ancient eyes
Her son began to love,
We thought the gates of paradise
That ancient one would prove.

But Lily found a son was in the loins
That evil Mark displayed for her alone,
The delicate enjambment of the lines
Of thighs arising from the savage bone.

Poor brother Mark, dead Abel, and the son,
And reckless Lily on the reedy shore,
The town gone mad, and everyone alone,
And nothing as it ever was before.

Job

Combination of Wagner and burlesque,
Denuded and bemused, like the fat beast
Leviathan, rolled on a beach of time he wears
Time like the ribboned colour of his wars,
Musing on wrecks and harbours.
A waste of middle ages rolls around
His corseted fat mind.
                                        This structure stays
A raving skeleton
Constructing puzzled strictures for his God.

Train Wreck

Where she passed over like a maiden aunt
No one was weeping; down the shocked bridge
Rode the gleaming cars, accoutrements
Fell, fell away, over the trestled edge;
Dolls, in the high void, yelled on the wind's hand
Buffeted and tumbled until time's end.

Girl once, shed her skins in that gay spring,
Was lighter; still on the topless waves forever
Where she crested the waves, would the young
Name she called in the broken car save her?
For once crowds got the sprawled sight
Of her razored limbs she'd shaved in the night.

These were my friends who feared and shared
A bald death; their heads in double halves
Bisected, bleak dichotomies, they are assured
Of unmanliness, like a pink fruit. Death's loves
So bloodshot and schizoid in his delicate left
Hand where some died till they nearly laughed.

Supported under air and water now, those names,
My shared friends, so easily gone to ruin
And parted under a weight of sky and rain
We scarcely can support, no longer claim
Our civil living union, this equinox that spares
Us from division, their spring of funeral spires.

Erie County

A fall countryside, pitched in the music of tin and horn
That time of year complaining tires wind out late time
When, like the wailing of geese, the horn's honking
And the shrill wind's choirs amuse the travellers
And the hunted flocks diminish in the pall of north.
A protracted time, the yellow leaves shake in their flame
Against our passing, though we pass bodies everywhere.

Still, border country is everywhere the same
And crossing frontiers still shifts place and time;
These rock through mind like cars
Pitched and lurched over the shouldered hump
At the road's bend where, placed together,
Past, and where we go, sail together
With only the sound of the wind.

In the soundless place shapes loom up mindless
And between horizons weave in humped and surly beasts
They are faster than voice
And made out of the mind's air, they have no history.
In our own past the saddled tall shapes are
Arrowing like geese toward the permanent fort,
Crouched like a soldier between two hills,
The last and lost place of our time of heroes.

Leda and the Swan

His tongue tripped like a hammer on a tin
Below his thoughts which grew alarming eyes,
And reeling sentences like twin drunk men
Spilled from his mouth and overwhelmed her sighs

While she said daffodils were pretty when
With wings, not arms, they reached towards the sky
He saw that rape take place and was a swan
And sober, when he heard her laugh, not cry.

Remarkably he damned the bird instead
Of her and hated swans from that day on.
For brushing two cold hands across her dead
And broken thighs she said he was the one

And by her twisted arms and smile he knew,
And rose, but when he tried to walk, he flew.

Aspects in a Mirror

Delight me no longer with this glass.
There are many things I should have done.
All images grow dimmer, pass.
The many are sustained in one.

Fine fevers, ravages, the broken mind,
The excess planned, superlatives arraigned,
The conqueror of Helen stoops to find
Her slender eye is pleased, not pained,

Whose waxen wings of senses flew so high
The sun through lambent gaze made liquid
All that solid was to try,
So came to earth and had not time to cry.

If Icarus is dead, Narcissus mad,
And Theseus crying for his string,
Why only plain men find the time is glad
And praise the plan of everything.

Not Poppy nor Mandragora

After the insomniac red day, the cosmetic night;
After the dangerous swaying, the addict's pale fret,
The sweat-stained shoulders, the expanding broad hands.
Now motiveless active Iagoes have revealed
Political handkerchiefs with that sick perfume
Of international adultery.

Mark this sweet Desdemona, Peace, see how her
Innocent, delicate face conceals the slut's eyes,
The wholly natural disease to be sheeted to another man,
Which honest Iago approves.

With that gone sleep narcotic fields behave
And their black seeds, like an enchantress,
Myriad-eyed; the ceaseless hand, suspicion,
Bends and waves; not poppy nor mandragora,
No, nor any natural sleep will give that ease
That takes the fields that charnel Collins' brave.

Only the jealous living contemplate
The exceptional light.
What broke the black moor's heart breaks theirs:
To be alive while Desdemona's dead.

Estevan Saskatchewan

A small town bears the mark of Cain,
Or the oldest brother with the dead king's wife
In a foul relation as viewed by sons,
Lies on the land, squat, producing
Love's queer offspring only,
Which issue drives the young
To feign a summer madness, consort with skulls,
While the farmer's chorus, a Greek harbinger,
Forecasts by frost or rings about the moon
How ill and black the seeds will grow.

This goodly frame, the earth, each of its sons,
With nature as a text, and common theme
The death of fathers, anguished in betrayal
From the first family returns a sacrifice
Of blood's brother, a splintered eyeball
Groined in the fields, scarecrow to crows.
This warns Ophelia to her morning song,
Bawdy as a lyric in a pretty brain gone bad,
While on those fields the stupid harvest lies.

Val Marie

I

Stiff-necked, double-towered and red, once shone
Who was so lovely in her pride now like a brute
Moved and chewed in the land. He saw the spine
Of her arched blade, the red heart whirring, the brute

Face in the metal, stitched and scarred, his brain
Spilling its ancient chaff like thoughts in wind
Of his years between the stubble and the grain;
Her skill stopped, himself split, his centre a whirlwind.

Gathered and bound, the golden ministers of wheat
Are witness to this death, the crow mourners
A clawed sermon in his eye. The natural wait
Begins in the furrow's lip, the mouth's murmur.

And over him she leans like love forever
Poised in her grief, her mechanical hover.

II

What he was skulled in and built, the frame of,
The grain and shelter of his house and place,
Bone's trust of jointure and contract, all claims have
Yielded in him who is separate and vagrant in flesh and place.

Now only the priestly policing of animal and bird
Sketches his plan in a snowed, in a sealed land,
The inform of his track, their stencil and care of a bared
And feared skill, his being unseen, that power gained.

Who is unhoused must so be guarded, wept;
The scare and margin of the personal keep, the lean-
To, the edge where he appears and disappears is kept
As our horizon, must, or breaks as he broke edge and plain,

Admits, ice ending, floe loose, all banks down, thus, over
The land, the thrust and roll of the permanent river.

III

Housed as paired relations in the familiar parlour
Where the gaunt clock, wall-print, stuffed fox, hour
Them to ancestry, they rock and swing on time, who winter
Among words, are attached, heated by quebec, a history of fire.

And cannot hear the current underneath the river, the frost
And ghost of water or, in the white-domed skull, the tree,
A black thought pointed with indignation, prest
And dwelling in the face of God, the windbreak, the sea

Of wind pouring over the face of north. They live
Together nor expect him back who in the field
Took out another nature—except that from the drove
In the stable animal sounds are mooted and raised, filled

With present discontent, brought on the wind of east,
The thud and rasp of a steel hoof, a horn, the change of the beast.

IV

The land goes out like sea at Frenchman's creek,
Dipped from Dakota where the ice-head lolled
And nodded in the sun; here too is sea-wrack
In the land a thousand miles from sea, rolled

Out of God knows where and beached against these shoals,
The ridge of Mary's valley. A gull screams
Looking for water over these bones and shells,
North to the lake behind the damned and rotting streams.

Who praised the sick Leviathan as dead?
Towns are five-masted here and work the sea—
Their boats are out, pinned at the dust-wake's head,
Fishing for loaves above the sea-wrack and the sea.

From Mary's valley, men, men's wives, and pelican
Look northward to the ice-beast, where it ran.

Fair in Town

At noon the town rose up in mass, and square
Streets pinwheeled and flared, steeples there
Shook upwards in the centre of the town
Beneath the startled sentries' eyes, and there
Below that shivering radius of the air.

Then spired and domed and breathing
Its own radiance in a breathless hour
The town lost itself on heights higher
Than where its pennants furled and sang.
Unguarded and alert now in the new spirit
The singing town became itself and all
Hung and wavered over the pit where time sang.

Over the covering of this altered tent town
Clown clouds tumbled and sang like cherubs
In their rags and noise of light, flocks and frights
Released in the tenanted air descended as signs,
Bearing their coloured papers in their bills.

Then into the staggered row of crowds
Who chorused an awe, heaped wagon loads of girls,
Artists spangling and twirling over the wired high strands,
A maze of jugglers, ropes, bands, and crowds
And freaks of time drove with their shrieks,
Bowing with aghast hands before the star.

But north from here the indivisible line
Divides two lands like the actual river,
A finger of God pushing hills into plains
Like clothes through a wringer, pressing
The past into its present form before
Us, and assumed by the frayed and folded land.

Now smoke over the washed and bleached sky
Runs and smears; a new choir of boys plays
In the shacks, shambles through tin,
Assembles scraps, then poised like geese
Listens while the iron whistles
Are fingered and sing through the organ pipes
Of the black chimneys over the spired city.

FUSELI POEMS

The only Man that e'er I knew
Who did not make me almost spew
Was Fuseli: he was both Turk and Jew
And so, dear Christian Friend, how do you do?

—William Blake

The Fire Place

A furnace is of stone and clay,
A fire burns inside the stone,
Beside the flame Fuseli lay,
The heart within it was his own.

Fuseli, when the witch came in,
Raised the roof above his stone,
On her thighs he painted sin,
On her head a horse's mane.

From her lips a vocal moth
Issued screaming to the smoke,
Augustan ladies in their mirth
Gathered folds about her smock.

In the smoking cup a sea,
By the bed a painted ship,
In the door a massive key,
On the floor an open trap.

Coupled with a horse a man
Leans upon her breast and sighs,
Flaming curtains issue then,
Thus between the witch's thighs.

A Castle and Two Inhabitants

1

The several stories of the castle,
Placed rickety like box on box
Or like those Chinese puzzles
That are whole outside but inside
Piece in piece, were carpentered
A while ago. The builder is inside.
We think he must be, for we never
Saw him leave it, nor indeed go in.

It simply stands there, stands,
Though how it stands no one explains,
Nor how to go from room to room,
Nor why the king has chosen it
Upon a dreadful plane of space
To live in, there to hold his court.

2

There is a hunchback in the court
Who loves his daughter and who serves
The king with stories of a hunchback love.
The crooked ways are best, he says,
The only way a cripple learns to move,
And love is crooked and the twist is this:
My hunchback proves it.

Like the sun at noon
Hunched over earth that splendid hump
Curls round his body, like a swollen pear
Hung from a leafless tree, like the earth
On Atlas as he sways beneath its load.

He lumps it in our faces and he leers
About our daughters and he loves his own
And monthly serves the king a wreath,
The queen's own hair upon a horn.

3

There is a wizard also in our court
Who is both man and woman and who knows
How women love, who says the hunchback
Lied to us. Love is trangular, he cries,
And shining algebras fall from his cap
Made out of crystals shivered from a frost
Of passion.
                    Sculpt from a crust of sky
An ice-cold man is propped on snowy stalks
Of dogma, double-eyed with embered coals.

Here generation ends. This simple love,
The wizard says, endures the rollick
Lust and summer of a hunchback sun.

The Counterfeiter

When my brother was brought to trial
a beastly judgment yawned a prison face
into his face, exposing several bars of bone,
a time-lock and its tumblers set in time.

So teeth were set against my brother's forgery,
the gold keys that he rang with labour in his cell,
the counterfeiting breath he etched in walls of bone.

The vault, my brother said, is resonant.
Now on his face the acid of his crime has scored
the voices that he hears, the scars of god,
and for his punishment such daily burns.

Ice Palace

Only the blue men
of Saskatchewan
and the blue women
of Quebec

swim these white bone halls
the palace of King Skeleton
and only blue ones could.

He is the spear in water,
the sexless bird of prophecy,
the mantic mask of royal bone.

Journey through his doom alone.

For blue men do not speak
the way you speak, or cry
hail and farewell.

They squeak
like heels on ice

or needles on a gramophone.

Fuseli: Girl Combing Her Hair, Watched by a Young Man

1

the barring rock is black
and the pillar of his staff
is set upon a black arm,
he is pillar, all male, all glare.

this is nowhere
say the ladies of the street
see, in the black air
only the black there.

sheer wall is all there ?
is he perched on air ?
but that is black rock
on which his staff is set
and he is glaring there.

I think Porphyro stared
from the same rock
and wore the same staff
and stretched the same arm
in the black winter air

and cried, despair.

2

Morality officer
had built the castle well.
Wall sheer, no man hung there.
And the rock so strong you could found
A church upon it.

Some say it is not rock.
Some say the castle is not where I say it is.
Some say that any man may go to see her comb
By midnight light her long black hair, the light
By mirrors multiplied, the lies of candlelight
Upon her unoffending flesh.
And have been there.

Or whether there are beasts beneath the moat?
Or whether there are watchers in the wall?
Or whether she had spoken to him through the wall?

He will stand forever stony in my stare,
The rock, my prison and his life.

3

You will ask how I came here. In my 36th year
by libraries and paintings, and the landscape
now northern, a bruised sky, punctured by pines,
and how the university could tolerate me,
what night it was I hung from the rock
and whether my father knew.
I met
murder on the way and the face of a Principal,
in the rock I saw the hands of moralists
and the drowned officer who served my warrant
crying, on my rock this first church.

You will understand how much of this is description,
how in the valley mothers would gather, the river
swollen, the mustard milky and sticky, breasted plant,
and how icy sons blossomed like crystal.

Notes from the Underground

A woman built herself a cave
    and furnished it with torn machines
    and tree-shaped trunks and dictionaries.
Out of the town where she sprang
    to her cave of rusting texts and springs
    rushed fables of indifferent rape
    and children slain indifferently
    and daily blood.

Would you believe how free I have become
    with lusting after her?
                                        That I have become
    a melodramatist, my friends ashamed?

I have seen by the light of her burning texts
    how the indifferent blood drips
    from the brass mouths of my friends,
    how at the same table I have supped
    and grown fat.

Her breasts are planets in a reedy slough.
Lie down beside that slough awhile
    and taste the bitter reeds.

Read in the water how a drowning man
    sings of a free green life.

Song

When the echo of the last footstep dies
and on the empty street you turn empty eyes,
   what do you think that you will see?
      A hangman and a hanging tree.

      When there are no more voices
      and yet you hear voices singing
            in the hot street,
what do you think will be their song?
Glory to the hangman who is never wrong.

When on the hot sands of your burning mind
     the iron footsteps clang no more
     and blind eyes no longer see
            and hot voices end,
     what do you think will be your plea?
     Hanging isn't good enough for me.

The Gold Bug

a poisonous bee burst his pod
in the palm of my hand
                                        his venom

flowed over my hand like honey

now honoured among men
I gesture with my golden hand
and speak with the language of money

Poetic Process

i

the excitement of images
like pepper
                tickled me to
such a mental sneeze
that I thought
                        ah now
the mucus of today's prose
is all blown away
and I can breathe again
the fresh clean air of poetry.

ii

expecting always
a rocket metaphor
blazing over an unexplored interior

I find only
this damp fuse
of an unlit simile
lying like a shoelace
on the familiar sidewalk of my mind.

Biopsy

(the excision and diagnostic study of a
piece of tissue from a living body)

A specialist in flesh
        though not a butcher
I suffer the impress
        of daily blood,

        grutch of groin,
        grimace of muscle.
In the expanse of spirit
the wretch I daily wrestle
        is not the sprite
        of mythical delight,
this marrow-coloured thug,
a dragon, or a mutton joint.

Tell me, learner of rags
and tissues, is my giant
        wretched by design,
        malignant, or benign?
            This marrow-man
the human form divine?

Ducks in a Pond

1

Hairy and huge, old sun stood
up to his neck in a slough
and ever from his coronal arm
coins to mallards he threw
and mallards in a spume of mire
leaped to the touch of web and fire.

2

One must have a cold, reedy skin
(touching this question of fire)
to tread out a froth of zeal
under the armpits of the hairy wheel
under the arm of the sweating sun
to maunder in a slough of sweat
and skin of water touched by fire.

3

About the death of ducks in ice
I know nothing, but mallards know
of Franklin underfoot, his men
on Boothia and their frozen dance
in snowy froth that stoned the eye,
the sun a cataract in a blinding day.

4

The zeal of ducks for noise
(touching this question of fire)
is not the music that I hoped to hear
(Isaiah's coal, the final choir)
but poise of mallards in a pool
as in the pupil of an eye where fire
burned on water seems a pose of praise
sufficient for the gabble of my days.

Palisade of Images

Stevens being dead: 75 - 3/8/55
I owe him this
                    "just one more truth, one more
Element in the immense disorder of truths."
                                        not pastoral
                                        nothing for Dylan
                                        done in early
that great hospital gong silent and the tongue
a useless clapper in the bell
but for a better arrangement
a kind of insurance against doubt

arranging bees honeycomb feeling
into wax
into box
and sweetness crumbles on the tongue
to merely crystal, the calligraphy of taste

or the iconographic fly,   perpetual puritan,
                                imagines on carcasses
                                clean blue colonies
and at the shudder of my step
dissolves society, is stinking fly

well, Wallace has his clean eternal order now
clatter of card-sorting in his office for his poem
stamps him
flips him
into a strong box, honeycomb of unlettered cards

perhaps the Great Bear feeds on such papery dew
his paw inside the blighted log of Time
and perhaps ants and flies from all the centuries
run out of it over his hairy chest

I write this in hot August, my room
palisaded with images
                        of bees
                        of flies
of cardboard Stevens in his honeycomb of lies.

Emblems

(In Memory of my Mother)

Anteroom or forgotten woods
        (or room like woods, sun branching
                treelight and windows like leaves
                        on a trunk of knots and years)

Under the years' tree is Eva printed like grain
        (scripture of bark, the tree-print
                of a hard A, a horned tree
                        toadlike crouched above her)

A synagogal antechamber where I pray
        between the desert and the flower
                the band of god upon my arm
                        black as my veins' blood

Branches into a treelike S, the name
        a thong of a word, a branched bond
                the god-thong, and a ring
                        like black timbrels

Celebrate this solemn bond of god and me
        for music at the feast the scroll
                glows like a curled and purple flower
                        is stringed and resonant as a psalm

The harder marriage that my mother made
        with trees and rocks is magnified by this:
                the law is heavy on the rabbi's back
                        and the choir sings of the glory of god

The Damp Pilgrim

Was it the mouth?
The air around that castle stank of moat.
Westward a few pilgrims dragged along
Up to the steepled hill now steeped in sun
The growing shadows of their pointed hoods.
And damp inside, damp hung in mist,
Damp hung in ropes of froth along the walls.
I say the brilliant castle stank of moat.

It was in Holland or in Hungary.
The King collected all his furs, and still
He shivered, shook, and cursed the damp.
The Queen, afflicted, wept for mould-encrusted gems.
The pilgrims moved toward the steepled peak.

Clang! went the merry jestêr in the court
And shook his mitred locks and rang
As hollow as a bell hung in a well.
Clang answered from the chains that hung below.

I would leave the court, leave hall, leave
Hollow echoing and damp and find some room
Gone yellow, dry, and dusty with old time
As parched and faded as the pages of my book.

The pilgrims huddle on the steaming peak.
Steeped in its mist the castle shakes below.

Humanities Association

The man with the cocktail glasses in his eyes
opens a rum-coloured mouth:
                                        your tongue, sir,
flickers like the sun of Egypt on the running
Nile, crocodile-smooth.
                                        Have you noticed now
that smoke below the ladies' stove-pipe hats
smells of the jungle?
                                        Is it Trachoma smears
a tear across your eyes? Are these flies
that speck my pupils with the glue of blood?

Your words, sir, buzz in the desert
like a plague upon the promised few
who lately chewed the promised calf
and now are Israel
                              in the blind blue ocean
                              of this sinking room.

Metamorphosis

a

In that final rage I saw my hair turn white
and my legs stiffen with a wintry rage
and the frost of my hatred of loving daughters,
and I beat my fool for several hours
for saying epigrams of eggs.
                                        Then
there was a terrible rush of birds' wings
and all my horses became centaurs.
I heard in the hot afternoon the sound
of flies and spiders in their wars.
All my robes fell away, the rain began to fall,
and noble sons of kingly men begged me to shelter.

What bird had fouled that straw, what name
uttered a fire in my pallet where I lay.

b

Looking at her, my eyes magnified by anger,
I saw her nose collapse to nostrils in her face,
her eyes narrow, her eyelids disappear,
her lips extend into a pointed, yellow beak.
I thanked the transformation of my rage
that gave me vision.
                          Later, to my horror,
I discovered that my eyes were little stones
and on my hand instead of hair were quills,
and in my blood, not hers, the reptile crawled.

Intellectual beauty, how we are shrunken now.

In the Caves of My City

If I said that in the caves of our city
I have seen these eyes glare, and the bent gaze
like a pin, or a sun orbiting a dark and silent moon,
and the clenched brow, a fist like Job's or Blake's
to hammer iron language into shape
                                        or that the mouth
roared like the rustle of paper, or the sigh of elms
sick with the dutch disease, or the sound made by dikes
at the thought of the sea piling its green lava
onto the hissing towns,
                              would you then shrug
and say: animals have visions, the beast
is not at ease until he's clean.
                                        Dirt?
You look at your nails: the horns of Jericho,
Joshua once clawed down walls, Isaiah shrieked
a mouthful of dikes at Leviathan (hooked him
on a simile shaped like a beak, hung him
on its barb).
                    The word. I see her summer dress
lift, in the white of her skin, a leprous snow,
the red slash of the sun smiles below
her bruised blue brow.
                              Must I become Chaplin
to praise and save her? My tongue flickers
like a newsreel, and with epileptic grace
I lurch through the twenties of my mind,
a celluloid hero, fabulous as a Basilisk
who pins me in the caves of my city.

Doctors of Physics

These, when Egypt crouches on the strip
With eastern arms, and mills at home throw up
Great smoke from furnaces, can plot
The misty chambers of the sweating sun.
The river sinks into the mud this fall
By Montcalm's road where Arnold and his men
Wintered in rags and where, howling again,
The revolution killed men in Blake's time.
This one hates his wife, thinks Medicine
A fraud, insists on being Doctor to all men.
That one, long divorced, hurtles his foreign
Car through stinging sand at Watkin's Glen,
Crouched in his bucket-seat like Beurling
Who to Egypt sold his smoking guns.

Two Part Exercise on a Single Image

I

I come into the desolation
Of this calm September town
Which slants out of morning
Into the wild disaster of sunlight,
And I see that my street is a tree
Split into a thousand sentences
Any one of which can hang me.
Birds in that tree utter phrases
Which are pebbles of glass that flow
Into the light of a river,
And the paned mirror of the river
Gives up the restless image
Of a man walking down slanting streets
Like corridors in "Blood of a Poet."
The sun shatters my tree
In a wind of light
Into a torch in the unexplained
Interior, luminous with volcanoes,
Dark fig trees, and the white
Hunched question mark of a polar bear.

II

You think it is easy? A matter of words?
And wonder that I'm a poor speller?
Let me tell you that this has nothing to do
With teaching or even the love of poetry.
It is the calamity of an eyesore, a stye,
A social disaster. Look for once
At the real, ridiculous humped self
Crouched in the unexplained interior.
See it looming in the light
Of exploding volcanoes and dark fig trees
Like the hunched white question mark
Of a polar bear.
Oh my friend, I too like company
And have ambitions in business.

Hallowe'en by St. Mary's Convent

A whitewashed wall.
Two shadows of a single nun
pass and repass vine, wall, vine again.
Time gathers the plucked fruit
in a heaped sunlight of gourds.

Gourds
        multiple as the sun
        eclipsed on coloured film
        climb the white and darkening
        shadow of the wall.

Streetlights blossom on their stems.
Like honeybees in lust of bloom
small Spirits hum through meadows of the dark
toward the petalled homes, the flowered rooms.
And out of Revelation, Angels swarm
to feed on spiritual sweet food,
globed fruit, round nut, and jelly bean.

Such occult cheerfulness the swarm
exudes from sticky maiche of skull
and sheeted ghost, gusty with laugh,
as makes them guest, forgives the child
his candle in the skull, forgives
his blinded eye, his idiotic grin,
all ills of flesh unmasked by mask on flesh.

Envoy

The time is pious then.
I fill the praying hands.
But mantis at the end
this infant understands
his father's pious eye,
runs off with fruit of vine
and mocks his father's piety.

A Season of Denials

Let there be, I said, a furious last unsexing.
The world's great hysterectomy has come.

Physician, here extract a song of spring,
a Purim song in which I mash in plum juice
villain Haman (or date flesh) and eat the spring

or nip the Pesach song out of its bud
of who beats who to death beats death
to death: the walls fall down
                                        the walls
of dough rise up at latter day
                                   Egyptian clay
is dough to beat to death.

Physician, in your narrow way,
you probe. Touch the ripe song of fall:
the wail, the rabbi's siren yell,
"There's fire in the leaves to burn the world."

The Dialogue of Last Mountain Lake

The advocate in his manure-coloured suit
    who recently appeared (in spring-soiled clothes)
    declared a moratorium on plaster saints and stucco.

    What is needed (he sniffed) is a Parisian motif.

    Was this not laughable? Timidly, I suggested dialect,
    jokes about travelling salesmen, country daughters.

I have gone to and fro (he pontificated) in the earth
    and up and down in it and found on the great wheel
    (whale) no virtuous man: touch his bone and flesh
    and he will curse you to your face.
                                        This seemed now
matter for the authorized daily prayer book (commentary)
or a dialogue of Plato's—nothing frivolous—nothing
that did not hang heavily with metaphysics.

I flung out this last hope like a stone
    and it plunged to the bottom:
                                    image strewn
(improbable as a blue kidney, the lake, its alkali spume
hung on the rim, the hub a sunk sun, gave up the white
wreckage of trees, black flies: like shawled old men
of the synagogue bent over their prayer books, like black
insects the Hebrew letters wriggling and jumping).

Conversation Overheard between a Knight and a Girl

The old knight, confused quixote, white
From toe to ear, hopeful bergerac,
Sang Roman de la Rose on his tottering nag
And gaily mumbling favours in his beard
Drew reign and touched his beaver to the girl.

Slip of a thing, whorled ears, pale pink,
Complexioned like a shell, with almond eyes
And innocent wide lips like wings.

"Oh knight, but you are old, old drone.
Those threads were muscles once
Until you fell and going down
Were chased about the town
By the lion and the unicorn."

"Most fair and still more fair
Who fairly treat, remember still
Imagined wings, and at the royal joust
Who fought the tawny wind and broke the mill
And planted seven pennants on a hill."

Acis

There was her message. Suddenly
His blood had turned to water.
She looked into his eyes and saw
They swam, no shore behind them,
Looking toward the green and lighted sea,
A fish-like stare, a dolphin memory.

Ceremony for Rosh Hashonah

The laced chambers of God's stage
run golden with the curtains of his blood.

The Shakespearean tree binds up its leaves.

Sweet birds fall
plump in the yesty waves of Hebrew breath,
the gruel of Hebrew winter.

Under a rented shawl,
each nervous fringe a law to finger, I see all
locality is breeched with gore and bawl
with townsman Jew the wail of years.

Profit and loss, saith the tailor, saith
a man in his rented shawl, saith
the robed rabbi to the scroll.

A mouth,
a moth, the scroll unrolls and rolls
the year into a scroll, binds up the year
of law and prophet.

The breach in nature closes.
On waves of Hebrew breath
the ark is steady and the scroll,
a golden leaf, is carried by the rabbi
through the singing Hebrew crowd.

City Park Merry-Go-Round

Freedom is seldom what you now believe.
Mostly you circle round and round the park:
Night follows day, these horses never leave.

Like children, love whatever you conceive,
See then our world as lights whirled in the dark.
Freedom is seldom what you now believe.

Your world moves up and down or seems to weave
And still you pass and pass that same old mark.
Night follows day, these horses never leave.

You thought your past was here, you might retrieve
That wild illusion whirling in the dark.
Freedom is seldom what you now believe.

Sick on that circle you begin to grieve.
You wish the ride would end and you could park.
Night follows day, these horses never leave.

Mostly you circle round and round the park.
You'd give your life now to be free to leave.
Freedom is seldom what you now believe.
Night follows day, these horses never leave.

Pillar of Fire

A man came to my tent door
in the heat of the day, the tent
stretched and slapped in the wind.
All the guy ropes went taut
And I felt my temples stretch
and throb in the noise and heat.

He talked about blowflies,
plague among the swollen cattle.
He asked about the children.
"You are a great nation.
Will you stay here long?"

That night the fire in the tent
vomited a great smoke.
The tent glowed like a furnace.
I dreamt about Egypt and its flies,
a priest dying of cancer.
I am told to breed more children,
try not to think about politics,
remember the Sabbath and my enemies.

Blizzard

(For AJMS)

Your clean pure northern snow,
dandruff, dead skin,
sluff of a dead god
in whose hair
like fleas
we are white entangled knots.

Saint Johns Near Montreal

Like a nail in heaven's eye
a spire of this town
draws blood of the sun.

Love and sorrow
tumble from the spire
into the river.

The mirror of the town
fills with Greco shapes
like Calvary or Spain
or bull-necked Montreal

where Saint John swims in time
below a hump-backed hill
below a nose-down whale.

When the catholic dark
wraps its black bandage
on God's bloody wounds

the whale erupts
in necklaces of foaming light
and spouts a brilliant cross.

Palinode

I don't suppose that poems can be made
Of private shame, or shame, or sham
Excesses of the spirit. Modest Locke
Once closed the door to godliness
And in his shaded room saw nothing
Of the wide, bruised sky of spring
Wrapped in its bandages of cloud,
And said, the underbrush is thick,
Until we've hacked a way through it
We cannot know the shape of the huge,
Deformed and practical Despair
Prowling in the woods beside his lair
Heaped with the bones of gay adventurers.

I say that it was spring, and it was then
As if with prison bars the ruler sun
Had strictly lined the air, as if
A kind of Dali plain, empty of bush,
Stretched out, as if the first ants
Of the year crawled on the wound
That lipped the iodine-stained sky,
And it was then I saw that private men
Were dragging loads of bone and flesh
In sackfuls to the edges of the plain.
I cried to stop it, saying, God, you know,
Inhabits each man's breast. Look at the sky,
The sun is Blake in excess of his glory
Come to clothe the naked twigs, and looked
And saw the drop of blood that hangs there
And saw it run and spread and soak the men
And saw it seeping, in the spring, out of those sacks.

City State

The comic mechanic
Emerging from his grease pit
Peers at his tulip
Which grows by his station
On Roxborough road.

The tragic academic
Observing this traffic
Peers in the grease pit
Crying, "Oedipus, oh Oedipus."

Between these twin spectres
Fixed at their stations
All day I hear
Cars passing and the moan
Of their choric rhetoric.

The Wind at Djemila

after Camus

the curve of carving
a bird's wing
in the ruin-shaped man
flutter and struggle
bruised wing
the stoneplea

philosophy of sun
the cave
dweller could not
imagine

the question that is a cry
mouthed by stone
the stone mouths of old
wasted in place
of place
the question
of place
the wasted question

philosophy of flight
the stone
man did not know

philosophy of place
the race
excelled in carving

The Professor as Bridegroom

Down the Groat Road when I roll,
a lost penny in the shabby morning,
and the powerhouse shrugs the sky (torn
overcoat) over its cold smoky shoulders,
the hills droop like breasts and a poor
sun-fire flares in the eastern womb
as though if a wind blew across (a hiss
either sighing or hopeless breath)
this city's thighs, there would be in
the cramped valley some kind of love
and the sky would fall, the powerhouse
collapse, the university tumble out of
its coffins, the trumpet-shaped concert
hall would hail my coming and puff
its last like a shabby professor on a cold day
running to tell of the end of classes.

Mr. Mandel's Sunday Service

I have heard singing and thought how singing maddens
the singers because their mouths are open in a shriek
and the strained muscles of the faces pull down the eyes
in a clown's cry.
                    Around the stake where the dying bear
has lolled for several days the singers are open-mouthed
and at the pit where the bear baited the virgin
                                                            where
the court musicians squeezed the rare mouth-sweat
into the petals of their horns like bees dripping
honey on the horns of lilies
                                        the song was a bridegroom
pacing his claim to the tent of his blue bride.

This cosmic song was sung my murderous friends
by you who raped the bear's girl before you hurled
her in the pit and you in whom the stake is never still.

Noon Hour

The white unceremonious city
became a square white rock
like Jacob sleeping in the sand

and from the loins of noon
ladies out of offices and banks
spilled like the hot noon wind.

They moved up and down
the ladder of streets and trees.

They fluttered into the sun
like the papery sheep of cartoons
or sleep

except for one
who white and solid as the sun
grew in the landscape of ladders and salt
like Lot's wife
looking toward the gates of burning rock
over the twin cities of her doom.

Her hand within the hollow of my groin
burned like white salt
and all day long the city wrestled in the noon.

Weather Vane

The cock of summer shakes his golden comb
And fire falls upon the rook-filled trees;
The world-ash glows, Yggdrasil shakes in flame,
All day the fire burns inside the trees.

At four the rooks arise and fly away,
I hear the cry of rooks and insect horns,
The hawk above my house turns, turns away,
Deep in the valley stride the unicorns.

This is the promised time: see now the brute
And cumulative word of god shape storms,
Now clouds of thunder shake the frame and root
Of this, my house; now on the shaking frame

The savage ruin of the rain pours forth:
The cock upon the weather vane points north.

Jewish Cemetery in Edmonton

If one could move bloodlessly
through the razor air
but
the white blood of the snow
drips on the wounded earth.

Trees, apprehensive as vines,
quiver over the slit veins.

Who, with his mouth, will stop
this cold blood or put his root
or seed into this vain wound?

Death of a Poet

Rhetoric, his rags, fell away first.
Illogical as a butterfly, also sterile,
He wavered over his words like flowers.

Then syntax, his spine, finally broke.
His gangling frame dangled and swung
On loose word wires, ambiguous organs,
Played by the wind in his brain.

These too fell apart
And his alphabetical skeleton
Scattered in grass.

What was an A
Sprouted a rose where he lay
And his I
Lately a seer
Pointed the face of a flower
To the orderly sun.

Here is the open cage of ribs
From which his heart went out.
It perched here like a parrot
Singing in its cage of ribs

But here no nouns verbs words are
Where his shocked and scarred sockets
Empty of eye
Let wind through
And all songs pass invisible.

Breathless now and without words
To put him together where he lies,
Permit me, natural maggot, a flight of B's,
To buzz over him, bless him, settle him there.

The Other Harmony: Not Imitation

Nothing simple: a particular lie
(blot) spreads like ink on a Rorschach card
like clouds over the moon
                                        and she
in the inky arms of the octopus
in the bottled sea
                        dizzily
is my squalid, squat, and masculine
mother
          I made this (decked out
as a dandy) and I have made other
seas
     and shall again in the winter
sail farther than Saskatoon or Calgary.

Pictures in an Asylum

The shock is
                do not honour verity
                that lie you told, it is here
                under the sea, under the sea

the shock is
                do not love so many
                love is the stone that tears
                the bladder on the yellow sea

the shock is
                things are what they seem to be
                there is no god
                no love nor verity
                under the sea, under the sea

and the shock is
                sharp as ice-picks in the brain
                the child is sane
                the child is sane again

Prologue

I think it was burned on. And the smell.
No one would go near it for days after it appeared.
There was hell to pay in the council, everyone
Dredged muck out of the past. The mayor quit.

They tried whitewash. See it anyhow, blacker
Than sin on Sunday. Tried burning. Smoke choked
The town for days, and the fence was still there.

Bees swarmed, honey of smoke, out of the old
Witch tree and got into the kitchen chimney,
Stung the cook and she quit too.
Slop all over the wall where she threw the pail.
The air was blue with bees and words.

Preacher says,
                    Hell fire aint good enough.
Preacher says,
                    It burns and it aint burned.
Kind of like drought. The day's coming.
The fine critter bouncing on the hill
Aint the same when she's laid low.
Skinned she's awful.
Like the insides of a calving cow.

And you cant blow the spots off a leopard anyhow.

Phaeton

The giant wink in a clown's cheek
Shrinks the flared noon of his eye
And then it opens, moony and alarmed,
And spins concentric circles
Like a cartoon of stunned cat
Eye-struck by perpetual brickbats.

The snuff and puff of lung stuff
Wreathes the bright neck, the flashing mane,
The wide nostrils of a painted horse.

I saw this on a parchment once,
Eye, horse, and windy cheek,
Or sat that horse as frightened boy
And felt the sun go round and round
And take me with him by the ten taut reins
Of my skinned and burning hands.

Children of the Sun

Light falls upon them and they see the form
That gave them birth and praise it with the names
Of northern trees, the cedar and the pine and fir,
The wood within the wood to build the form
That all may praise what the eye sees and the ear
Hears amid the rock and in the weary hills
Over the sleeping land where night falls.

I think about my past and try to change
Into a singing metaphor a silent heart,
A frail red parrot perched within its cage
Repeating what it hears and cackling without change
All that ear hears and tongue speaks. I form in thought
The singing form that forms the silent heart.

But parrots bring in sleep only the surly shape
Of images of men turned into beasts
Carrying their loads of shame upon their backs,
That forest where the trees are shapes of girls
And every stone an image of a face, and eyes
Are in the flowers, and I could weep for all
Those lost and stoned and silent faces.

Such images rise up in thought as out of dreams
Rose from the sea, still hung in weeds,
To haunt poor Shelley or to torment Yeats,
Such as, oh fury of the winged and hopeful mind,
Could wear this great world and show to naught,
One, that would drive among the children of the sun
Bearing a singing sword, and in his hands,
Held for the eyes of all to see, the head
Of that great bull and all to hear his bellowing.

Map of Love

I was sure that his children were lousy
and his wife's eczema thickest
around her thighs
                    like a map
of a tyrant's gradual conquest
of Europe
                or a medical diagram
of the advanced tumours of love.

The President Ordains the Fee to Be

I have a furious quarrel with myself
and I ask my wife : "Who should be saved
and who is now the ruler of China?"

And before the natives can pay
the president his yearly gold
(before the python grows from his arm
and circles his shining head)
she says:
            "Cold comfort
in your vision of order.
                        Cold
you will be in my arms before
the president of China or
the president of Siam or
the president
                will say:
'The design is grand;
here is a thousand;
build you now in Edmonton
or in Jerusalem
all that you ever planned'."

Merits of Laughter and Lust

In this green world budged by the round shoulder
Of the infamous sky, sometime even badgers
Are jovial; not everything is either digging
Or superior as the lifting cloud, the smile
Of the efficient harlot after the loveless act.
Madman Smart believed there are angels in flowers
And gems shining lightly in the depths of mines,
And wiser Ovid knew that lust is tough,
Survives scorn. So after Phaeton wrecked it,
Jove built Arcady again, and so today I love
The white round shoulder of the distant sky.

Landscape

The tree shaped like a lock against the sky
And the river like a door and like a key

The sorrowing sun looks in, there is a rim
Around the world, ships topple from the rim

Into the sun but topple back and still are here,
There is a rim and the river shuts like a door.

The tree shaped like a coffin or a nail
And the river like a dark misshapen door

And the sun crouched in his terrible lair
Looks in on the falling ships, the unmusical

Falling ships, and the trees lined up the wall
Like mourners at my mother's funeral.

Entomology

Listen. There are some rooms
sticky with the gut of lies
where spidery ladies squat
over the husks of dead blue
reputations

and I have seen the grasshopper mouths
of men nibbling at the green
branching words of poets

and from minds like shut closets
little white thoughts
sometimes flutter out

I shudder to think of what they have eaten,
especially when they were fat pale larvae,
the massed grave thoughts of mediocrity.

Ironist

The sly fox, my friend, my little sel
fish foe and fowl chaser,
Hides wings beak bone in a bel
ly in a bush as red as tasty
as a gooseberry

He devours my heart, this fox, my
friendly enemy, and his (O
Ver his red stained teeth) eye
(and bristled jaw) is
bone bright and merry

Fur, my friend, will fox you yet,
will, for my sweet and song,
My bird-like girl has on her hot
high shoulders hung
fur, to please my lady.

Doll on the Mantelpiece

Here on the mantel where a Dresden doll
Looks into a frozen german hill
All is still, chill, white,
Except the red stain on her lips,
The blood of colour there.

She is poised for a dance above the fire,
A hand out for a partner neither here
Nor anywhere. The fire breathes below
A savage noise of wood and she looks out
Over the white hill, still as a doll,
Chill in her world of ivory.

Why do I think of clowns, of emperors,
Of Nietzsche in his tower and all Berlin
Falling in flames while this silly doll
Stands on a fire, calm beside a frozen hill?

Mail Order Catalogue

(logos of things in the outhouse
paradigm of experience
from beginning: abdominal belts
to end: zippers, lightning

the art of communication
icons of the graffitic world) :

bound, stretched, boned women
hung by the harps of their hair
the wire of their thighs

unravished brides   fence
an acre of grass, a seed plot

and what mysterious rites
of harrow, plow, and drill

and hired men walking on the hill
all in a blaze of fire, the wire
strung from their hands like harps
fencing the acres

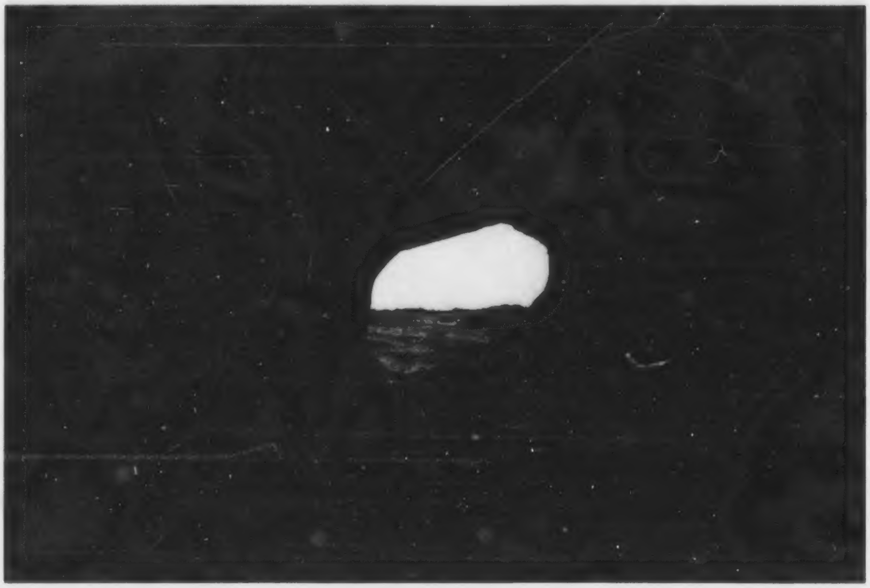
                              stays, pants,
the attic urn, scored in the grain
a low relief, a lowing heifer,
a bull on the wall.

Epilogue

When our mayor was put out to eat grass
And on the street manholes opened like eyes,
Everyone said it had come from below
Because the street was nervous, empty,
And the sewers rumbled for days, the wires
Sang in the high wind and cracks appeared
In the gray cement like folds in an elephant's hide.

Everyone said it had come from below
Because the banks toppled over like great gods
And fire flamed out of the mouth of the stock exchange,
And our bird-like mayor, like a hoofed thing,
Galloped away to the green fields in the country.

BLACK AND SECRET MAN



… Macbeth can be made an object of terror,—
to render him so you must place him on a ridge, his
down-dashed eye absorbed by the murky abyss; surround
the horrid vision with darkness, exclude its limits,
and shear its light to glimpses.

Fuseli

Stones have been known to move and trees to speak;
Augurs and understood relations have
By magot-pies and choughs and rooks brought forth
The secret'st man of blood.

Macbeth

Black and Secret Man

These are the pictures that I took: you see
The garden here outside my home. You see
The roots which hung my father, mother's
Tangled hedge, this runnelled creeper vine.
Here is the tree where in the summer hung
The guest of summer, temple-haunting martlet.
And here the tree with twenty mortal murders
On its crown.
                Now face the faces in the tree,
The snarling wood, the years of treedom.
Why, once when brains were out a man would die
But now like maggot-pies and choughs and rooks
A black and secret man of blood walks
In the garden.
                I never go there now.

But go there, go there, go there,
Snaps the hanging snapshot bird.

Aesop

I am a fable looking for a plot
On which to hang my animal tale.
Actually, I am an unwritten tale.
That is why I seem to you a grocer,
The father of the author of this play,
Who in his life, before he was a fable
Was a grocer:
                    like certain beasts,
Like Aesop himself who is the father
Of the beasts I will become before
This poem has become its play
And all the lions players in it:

Like that pancake of a man
That bladder, baker man,
That hunchbacked, saucer,
Saltcellar, pepper man,
That dinner for the beasts
Who ran up and down inside him
Whom he became
                              that foxy man,
That lionhearted man, that beaker-
With-a-crow-inside-it-man,
That jackdaw, peacock, ox, mule,
Goose, mouse, goat man
                                        was
A sort of dinner, that is to say,
A grocer for the beasts inside him.

This is a fable of a grocer, then,
A tale of beasts. I see them now
Outside of him: the many-headed beasts
Who seem about to speak in me.

Mary Midnight's Prologue

I don't doubt that I prefer London, 1763,
Though why I was born there baffles me.
I seem to remember hop-fields in Kent
Before the darkness fell on me in Lent.

But someone called me in my cave
And now emerged in light, my love,
I come to embrace you in my pantaloons
And my almanac wisdom in my belly's balloon.

Inside me you will find all wisdom,
The magazine before catalogue and doom
Where I unpage the universal heart
Of continental tears and provinces of hurt.

Do not be afraid of my vulvular mouth.
Such darkness was before the dust.
Such darkness will be after wrath.
In such darkness will be after birth.

I have swallowed other poets in other times.
My uterus is seminal with rhymes.
You think your present is your singing past.
I know the darkness is the future lost.

Now I shall become your landscape
Now the towns of your eyes will collapse
Now you will join your body's slough
To the water of mother of all the dead.

Charles Isaac Mandel

Those uplands of the suburban mind,
sunlit, where dwell the lithe ironists,
athletic as greeks, boy-lovers,
mathematical in love as in science.
Formalists. What have I to do with them?
I gather the few relics of my father:
his soiled Tallis, his Tefillin,
the strict black leather of his dark faith.

Conversation with a White Pony

i

By the castle, underneath the moat's reeds,
You will find the bones of many babies.
There was only one Moses.

ii

Even a banana peel or a nut's husk
May be a poem.
                I have read your work.
Why must you say there's no garbage?

Secret Flower

Secret flower
    of my own design
sometimes you are a house
sometimes you unfold
ages and ages old
    you are sometimes
    a house with four rooms
    and four kings
    and four queens

Deeper and more secret
darker and older
you unfold
    a poison tree
where you hang lovers
on your petals

I have watched the lovers
drop from your petals
into the room of kings
before the table of judges.

How can this be? It is Sunday
My children are making paper men
no one has been poisoned
no one has been hung
there is even laughter in the room.

Darker and still more secret
older and unfolded
beyond my designing heart
beyond even my crying out
through your four rooms
past the hanging tree
beyond the swaying lovers
beyond the judges

who is that lying on the green carpet?
who is being carried on the stone tablet?
why do these gesture and posture before me?

I kneel before the four-armed god
gather up the shredded paper heads
lift myself from the floor
and turn toward the suddenly open door.

Only One Other Reality among Other Orders?

i

This first one is a smelly dialogue:
This argument between a fish
And a man who is fish-eyed with anger.

Which one has hooked the other? I ask
As the line tightens between the fish and the man.

ii

This one is wordless because between stares
They climb toward one another as if they were lovers.
How laborious. How infinitely sad that two so
Step by step will come no closer and will pass
Without seeing, their eyes like spun glass
In their own light, in their imagined sun.

iii

This, the third, is truly intellectual:
A black gownful of lectures
Billowing from a man black as a blackboard
Scribbling all over himself
His quite real, his quite unreal,
His totally scribbled tongueful tune
He plays to himself in a roomful of runes.

iv

Not a person present? Only a dream
About people standing tree-still?
What could they whisper to one another,
These tree-people, with their sad boughs,
Their imploring wood, their black bodies
Like trunks filled with old yellow letters?
I think this is a winter scene.
I think there will be storms
And, then, perhaps, people.

v

Farther away from me move the still people
With their unread letters in their black trunks.
The fisherman dwindles into his fish.
The lovers stand on the steps of the sun
And the professor has blown away in his gown.

Carleton University: January 1961

To George Johnston

Imagine a speaking rock: stone-dumb
mountains lean over Ottawa
but even the dumb stone spires
of Parliament Hill aspire to speech.

There is something raucous in Ottawa:
coarse is the P.M.'s speech,
brash the Privy Council's course
between Hull and the unspeakable Laurentians.

I think of a child's yell of pain
when he is speared by malicious tables,
explanation animate, mythical, fabulous,
and then of you, articulate climber,
bruised by stony syntax
on the mountains of Gawain's English.

How many beastly tables have you slain
where Carleton and its new cement
utter a few blue nouns and glassy verbs
between the howling trains and muzzled snow?

On the Death of Dr. Tom Dooley

whether you start with the jungle
    and ask whether the jungle
    is inside or outside

whether what tangled Tom
    into a stumble of dirt
    is somebody's hate
    or somebody's love

    whether in darkness
labouring in darkness you go

into the darkness
whether the light falls through
cell into cell
leaf into leaf
whether the light falls through

or whether you start with the city
and ask whether the city
tangled upon itself
like a jungle
or today
like a leaf fallen from an ape's hand
its veins crushed
whether this leaf-like
city is this leaf-man
this man fallen from a tree
this man who is a city

and you run crying down his streets
saying: the queen light
has crowned the jungle
the jungle is a jewel
the royal jungle is light

whether you go from the light
into the darkness
whether you go from the darkness
into the light

crying over fallen leaves
over the ape called king
over the city called queen
over the leaf-man
the jungle
in the beginning
is the murderous end

Day of Atonement: Standing

My Lord, how stands it with me now
Who, standing here before you
(who, fierce as you are, are also just),
Cannot bow down. You order this.
Why, therefore, I must break
If bend I will not, yet bend I must.

But I address myself to you thus,
Covered and alert, and will not bare
My self. Then I must bear you,
Heavy as you are.
                                        This is the time
The bare tree bends in the fierce wind
And stripped, my God, springs to the sky.

Overheard at the Gaza Mill

I don't like evasion any more than you do
          but to speak out at this time
          is more dangerous than you might think:
          do you know what they burn on Fridays
          and why, and what they carry back?

Even with an inviolate ethic this happens:
          the market brilliant as blood
          soiled relics on the street
          and the athlete carted, a bundle of bones,
          into the ruined stadium, his owners profiting.

David

all day the gopher-killing boys
their sling-shot arms
their gopher-cries

the king insisting
my poetry must stop

I have written nothing since May

instead
walk among the boys
gopher-blood on their stretched
hands
murder will end murder
the saying goes, someone must
do something about the rodents
and poems do not:
even the doctors
admit that it's plague
ask me about my arms
look
at my shadow hanging
like a slingshot

the world turns like a murderous stone
my forehead aching with stars

Four Songs from the Book of Samuel

i

The Witch of Endor

every path a green lady
but I abandon green hair
for the wretch of winter
I handle a cold stone
take up the cold stones of her breast
my hands move in her icy hair

I walk over the stony harp
she plays in her cage of ribs
she casts down her spears
she waters my heart with ice

in the cave of her eyes
I see the coiling bed
she beckons me to with a hand of boughs
she is the black tree of winter

ii

a cave of eyes: here is the bed
here the springs where the youth fed
here the lilt of the king
the huddled clothes like a sleeping girl
the crows clawing their songs on the wall
the boneless millions slain in the dream
the young slayer on his springing horse

this is the nation's hope: here is the bed
here the murdering dreamer lay in his dream

iii

the intellect does not age, the body dies
daily the mind declares its lies
about the soul, about the self
about the body and its ageless cries

now mind grows freer as the body dies
daily the body ages in its lies
about the mind, about the self
about the mind's clear sense of paradise

iv

I forgive the adulterer, I forgive the song
I forgive the straw man in my bed
I forgive the old man his lies about the bed
I forgive my armies for their arms
I forgive the generals for their boots
and the mayors for their homes
and the councillors
                                        my mother
for her prophecies, my father
for his mistaken comfort in failure
my teachers for their religion
I forgive the girl's face in the flower
the instrumental poet hung on his strings
the colonies for the times they did not eat
I forgive the food of the armies
and the carpets under the general's feet
I forgive the poet for lying about god
I forgive god for tomorrow
I forgive the arisen prophet
the man who is a weapon
the weapon
death
the song
the singer dying in his song
even myself

In the Beginning

And so at last I too have come
To where that body by the shore
Lies in the twilight, where the sun
Drops like a pear-shaped groan
Into the consonantal surf.

A small star hisses in the salt,
Its bright S quenched,
Its vowels spilled and twisted:
The word as blood.

Now like a mouth the opening dark.
Now the wet, mouthing idiot, Night.

Thief Hanging in Baptist Halls

After a Sculpture by George Wallace

Amid the congratulations of summer,
polite vegetation, deans, a presbyterian sun,
brick minds quaintly shaped in gothic and glass,
here where the poise and thrust of speech
gleams like polished teak
I did not expect to see myself.

But there he hangs
shrugging on his hung lines,
soft as a pulped fruit or bird
in his welded soft suit of steel.

I wish he would not shrug
and smile weakly at me
as if ashamed that he is hanging there,
his dean's suit fallen off, his leg cocked
as if to run
or (too weak, too tired, too undone)
to do what can be done
about his nakedness.

Why should he hang there,
my insulting self, my deanship, all undone?

He dangles while the city bursts in green and steel,
black flower in the mouth of my speech:
the proud halls reel,
gothic and steel melt in the spinning sun.

Yonge Street Minstrel

For Raymond Souster

seeing your head weave
        your cheeks twitch
        your shoulders jump
I wonder who hit you
        whom do you hate
        for those early slaps

and seeing you, greyer now,
        but edgy
                all growl
I ask myself what bell rings
in the clamorous arena of your mind

and who will you take on next,
        at forty, the punch
        hard as before, reflexes
        quick, your eyes clear

don't you know they will get you
        in the ring or in some alley
        that they will break your mouth
that even the best go blind
        hear unevident birds

or do you care, thinking of brutes
        buckled and crushed
        the great roar
and the white centre blind with light?

Hebraism

The law is the law and is
terribly Hebrew which is as you
know mostly poems about cooking
and meat to be cured in water and
salt and children to be counted
for pages of generation amid clean
and also unclean women

Orpheus and Eurydice

Of the two ways of looking at it
I preferred his: it was neater,
though the plain fact is she knew
the way they ran the temple
and was right about the songs.

But when he kissed her,
blood upon her lips,
somehow he missed the point
and on the sabbath wrote a song
about her knees.

The girls got him with disease
and watched him fall away
in parts
like some old tree with warts,
or tree god rotting on the vine.

Orpheus in the Underworld

i

knowing how many had lied
knowing my own lies
knowing those who had gone before

difficult music
to walk through tangled words
soundless to move toward the sounding caves

remembering the omen and the gift
how to count each foot's new pace
ignore the pleading faces in the stone
be silent by the raucous trees
when the crows clamour for my voice

above all to look steadily
to look directly
to look
            where the snake waits
where the unflinching serpent
hunches in his unimpassioned
imperial gaze toward my song

ii

northward now
the remembered path
      contemptuous of meaning
      left behind
      with the orators
      beside their monuments and cannon

only the road now
the serpent path
      whatever the others say
      since there was no choice
      never a real alternative

the town far in the past
    despicable, squat
    a huddle of shacks
    like mourning women
like a dark king murmuring about harps

and the road billowing as if its swallowed dead
still lived in it
        like dust
        behind distended cars
which jump and croak like giant frogs,
their drivers black and goggled men

iii

as for the end
the reeling plains look southward
and the heat gathers like a beast

the women sweat silently
reading my poems

I watch their faces for the gleam
which tells me that the end begins
that ecstacy in which they burn my lies
and tear from me the poems which I cannot write

The Garden and the Gardener Are One

The mower bucks and roars.
Three passing motorists
bug-eyed as their cars
bulge with Sunday fruit.

In attitude of prayer
her bottom skyward bends
the bulging housewife
as she bows to weed.

Oh God, how tired you must be
of howls and asses.
Weren't these the sounds you heard,
the sights you saw,
when Eve bowed down her apple-cheeks
and Adam roared?

The Anarchist-Poets

Step carefully through this rubble of words.
Can you really say which wrecks were once poems,
which weapons?
                    Who once ran havoc
through these cities of language
scattering flowers of darkness,
black bursts of unmeaning?
                    What guerrillas
frantic for peace, love, home, nation,
government, even for death itself?

Hippolytus

In the unknowable space between this room
and the running mane of the horizon
where dimmer than thunder the clouds
shudder and toss under the wind's whip
I have been dreaming of horses

I have known mothers larger than boxcars
carrying the freight of years and wars
toward some stockyard of their minds
where they can count the slaughtered time

I too know something of punishment
there have been drownings even here
beside the dry reeds of the lakeless fields
hands have been held out to me
I dare not touch beside that unseen water
and once a beaten animal stumbled by
looking like someone's brother

easier then to praise passion
the strong in one another's arms
testing the machinery of love
the freight that moves the world's
horizons
                everyone knows the rules
what to ignore, when and how to whip
the beaten and to bruise the animals

at the edge of these dark waters
hearing the drums of the world movers
again begins the sound of hoofs
and I see the wet heaving horses of a last rain

The Direction Is North Until The Pole

When the thirty-first Separatist died in December
Navels were exposed as far south as Winnipeg.
At the University the Department of Anthropology
Split into twelve tribes, each named after a Jewish poet
While the DBS recorded a sharp drop in brassieres.

How can we turn aside from the mother
With her portable breast and murmuring vacuum?
Who will cradle the infant and his star?
The hockey players beat each other mercilessly
Despite the judges and the referees.

What shall we say to the father
Who reads us to sleep with stories in Hansard
Of Health, Welfare, and Immortal Grain?

Immortal grain is immortal grain, bread,
Beauty, beauty, beauty, jack, joke,
Potsherd, pledge, plum, plume, pork, barrel.
Shall we eat one another and die?
Who shall receive the hungry guests
Amid a miracle of loaves?

Let us be put upon
Let us for once be patient with the doctors
For the sake of the suffering artificial kidneys
For the agony of untransplanted hearts
For the unseeing eyes in their safety-deposit boxes
Until the last budget is brought down
And all the Flemings run into the sea.

A Cage of Oats

To James Reaney and Jay Macpherson

How many prisons do I count?
Here is the wall I first ran from
and here there is a second wall,
the wall I ran against to flee
the first, and here there is a cage.

Inside the cage there is a second cage.
Inside the second cage there is a third.

Inside the third
there is a bird.

A Quaker holds a box of oats
on which a Quaker holds a box.
A mirror mirrors oats
for oats are mirrors of their crops
which farmer-quaker-man will thresh
and eat to put the seeds inside
the Quaker man who holds a box.

There may be stars inside of stones
(or other stones): inside of stars
there may be burning seeds,

What boxed bird so great
that it can eat
stone, man, star, and burning seed?

In Camera

Expect only another of the same
    the same trees, the same hills,
    the same rivers, and the same
    sameness of the stuff that hills
    the rivers and that waters trees

    for this the hunting dog roughs
    his bushes on the scent of bird

    the boatman slides his hook
    into the water for a sliding fish

If the blurred bird explodes, unfleshes
    stuff fleshed for the dog's tooth

    if the flesh leaps from the barb
    and the bush parts on the hunter's step
    and the bird is gone
                                        expect only
    it was the same as trees and rivers:

    colour, odour
    trickle away on the sliding river

    and the hunched boatman waits
    in the sliding light where the dark gathers.

Cold Pastoral

I thought someone said cathedral
    stature of gold
    artificial bird
and eyes through shining hair.

I thought someone said drowning
    gather of weed
    swirling word
and shining eyes through water.

No one ever said ice ice ice
    globed blood
    wordless wind
and glacial eyes in the cadaver.

Departure

There was merely a brief note:
"Have seen Edmonton
am leaving at once."
                    I think:
it must have been the buildings
or perhaps the art gallery
or even the university.

But his friends tell me
he had no ambition
his children were slovenly
recently he recovered from a strange disease
he no longer knows what numbers are
nor understands the language spoken here.

Prairie as Hawk, Cock, Belly, Lover

Hawk beaks his bird in a lost rat.
No squeak unhooks her. Untowned rat
Flies in death. After the bird's beak
In her belly, earth eyes hawk.
Crazed lovers quarrel. Squawk
Earth and hawk: a sunset scrap.
Earth's end a cock's hot trap.

Death by Fire

It is this beggar's heart smouldering in a ruin
was once a man whom now no one can answer to.
See how gently, how tenderly the liquid runs to fire
And how those elements then wrestle where that body lies.

You think of love: a mannikin
whose mastering hands feel cool as plaster
and whose legs, jointed at her thighs,
come off each night to walk about your dreams.

Never this night of gasoline
these unbearable fumes
this prayer that for itself consumes
all that man's own resinous heart has fed
and all that in his veins runs like the fire red.

The Mayor's Papers

...am short of metaphors
      sent for counsel
advised to suit (said
      geese frozen
            in fountain)

      desperate need for
      metaphors
            saw the
goose feet in ice
            told
them about the mountains
      about the oil
      about deerslayers
deer in oil, oil mountains

      (said only something
about faulty sewers about
faulty sewers)
            tried the one
that goes: afternoon
      is like a faun

judge severe threat of contempt

            tried:
                  riverunto(p3)oil
wild scene (courtroom cleared
      heads rolling
      headlines)

only hope now the one about the girls
      something about harlotry
      something about Lot's wife
      something....

The Comedians

You might have expected music
But they move so slowly they make no sound.
Like swimmers they put their large hands
Up before their huge red mouths
As if to shove mountains of water
Inches over so they can breathe.

And yet you think you hear gasps,
Snuffling, muffled yelps, occasional
Screams when one wallops the other
Or with a paddle shuffles on his enormous feet
Toward his kneeling unsuspecting friend.

Sometimes in their drowning motions
They remove their arms and heads
And walk in their bodies like barrels.
What brute muscle leaps inside that shell
While pink girls roar into sugary cotton
And the candied light sprinkles smiles
Onto the sour faces of all carpenters?

No longer do I care for those critics
Who plead with me that Whitman is God.
As for that other poet, he too was lying.
Warmed by outlandish currents
I have begun to build an aquarium
Tolerant only for tropical fish
Who move like swimmers without sound
And nuzzle one another with their golden mouths.

February Thaw

All the white eunuchs
shrink from the sodden sun

out of new green pools
what trembling shadows?

almost (I think)
they might rise and walk
over girl-wet grass
toward the lately-cold
unclothed prim women
suddenly on all our lawns

Cassandra

This has nothing to do with brothels,
I mean her skill in war and politics,
how she makes us feel uneasy about daughters,
or moves in our bed as if on our limbs
hung generation we dare not think about.

Sometimes it seems my daughter or my wife
or my neighbour's wife, bright-eyed,
imitates an image out of sleep. They walk
as if I had dwindled, looking past me
toward unreasonable parliaments
crouching beside senatorial hills.

I have been practising this poetry in secret.
Also I have made advances toward pregnant women.
But there have been no unusual shadows,
all the swimming pools remain clear of blood,
and by the gates the watcher has not raised his arms.

Rapunzel

Girl in a Tower

Another one of those puzzles
there's not a farmer
skinny as a gold seed
tough as a nutcracker
can plough or crack.

How do towers grow like that?
Overnight: the garden
a green sky, its moon
like beet, its sun
a turnip underground?

Many girls lock themselves up,
become pantries, closets.
Some, like trees, grow bark,
and others, like rivers,
burble into dimpled pools.

But they are not these crooked
wicked towers, not rooms
inside of rooms, not brooms
to thrash out of a seedy man
his golden crop and garden.

I lean on a ladder of hair,
remember the right rhymes,
look up at the green head,
climb toward the turnip-colour sun.

There Is No One Here Except Us Comedians

If it is mystery you want
look again at the plain door
behind which stands
terrible in its mask
a 29-year-old smiling girl

I have seen in what we call dreams
a fairground of wheels inside wheels
where I am turned into nobody
nobody's son nobody's daughter

and orphanages
where children
drag toward iron gates yellow dolls
and huge rolling balls
made in the shape of towering fathers

I pray nightly for release
I ask of a door shaped like a bat
to fly away with me
I want to be in a wheatfield
stupid as grain yellowing in the sun
I want to be something like a bird,
part reptile, able to stare blankly
for minutes
                        at the jade trees
                        at the jewelled grass
                        at the crystal city

whispering blasphemy
I want to walk over the doors of the city
my bird feet tinkling at keyholes

I want you to know I am innocent
I want you to open the last door
into the field of orphan wheat
the orient grain the green golden corn

Among Those Beings Not This at Least

It isn't (forty years toward
        some end besides [including]
        death)
                        that I've been,
an example: merely a tree
with limp expressionless arms,
say, a willow, though the tree
has a merit I haven't
(considered as symbol, object
something sung about)

nor have I been like some streets
sagging with tenements, infested,
don't look too closely at my skin

or say a board or a boardwalk
with carts being wheeled over me
in which the stricken, mouth-twisted
old men let the years drool down
their sunset-rimmed eyes

not merely a board
                        not wooden
I apologize to my children
for the expressionless hours
the unplayed games, the Arthurs
I wasn't in the child's nighthood
poetry is a demanding art

sometimes I think I am a city
there is a steel furnace in my heart
roaring with a molten lion's mouth
and trains rush up and down my arms
toward terminals where lovers meet
on the tips of my fingers
and my suburban head is a builder's project
full of unsold homes
                        around my thighs
a garden of Boschian animals

carrying bedpans
                                        somewhere
(inside) loinward? Pancreatic?
Glandular as in brain or neck?
Anywhere there inside
watery and dismal
                                              a tremulous
fish and something utterly nude.

To My Children

A rose grew in my head
My father lay dead
My mother fell among stones
Two flowers grew in my loins

I sing to my blossoming wife
My father is dead
My mother abandoned her life
Why should I lay down my head

Stony and brittle my days
My children sing psalms
The rabbis are ancient and wise
Blessed be my flowering names

Memo from an Outpost of Empire

seen in the corridors:
    a girl bearing thorns, herself a thorn
    a river that walks like a man
    an athlete carrying a stadium upon his back

heard behind locked doors:
    the lock (I am a locked face)
    the key (I am a rock)
    the rock (unlock me)

endless corridors:
    long-eared words leap
    into the quicksilver
    into the silver side,
    the backside:

    sun wet as a rod
    weeping in the waters of a thigh

    Callipygian Venus:

    "Looked at simply as form,
    the relationship of plane
    and protuberance,
    the back view of the female body
    is more satisfactory than the front"

Clark, *The Nude*

though the strongest will lose their heads
though the best will fall to pieces
though there will be no mercy
even for the girls

AN IDIOT JOY

Is it an idiot joy that makes this animal, the most peculiar
animal of all, exclaim something? And he thinks this
reaction a sign, a proof, of eternity?

Saul Bellow, HERZOG

this was written for a foundling
alien, greek, hebrew
to the memory of my sane parents
in order not to go mad
and for my keeper's sake
that I might learn
singular love
no other is to blame

The Meaning of the I CHING

i

unopened
book of old men
orange-blossom book
before me
you were
how could you contain me?

do you not see I am the mouths
of telegraphs and cemeteries?
my mother groaned like the whole
of Western Union to deliver
my message
and yelling birthdays
that unrolled from my lungs
like ticker-tape for presidents
about to be murdered
I sped
on a line that flew
to the vanishing point of the west

before I was
you were
unopened book
do not craze me
with the odour of orange-blossom

do not sit there
like smiling old men

how could you contain me?

ii

under my fingers words form themselves
it's crazy to talk of temples in this day
but light brightens on my page
like today moving against the wooden house
all shapes change and yet stay
as if they were marble in autumn
as if in the marbled yellow autumn
each western house becomes a shrine
stiff against the age of days
under my fingers stiffly formed

one cannot be another, I cry,
let me not be crazed by poetry

I will walk in streets that vanish
noting peculiar elms like old women
who will crash under the storm of sun
that breaks elm, woman, man
into a crumble of stump and bark
until the air is once more clear
in the sane emptiness of fall

iii

my body speaks to me
as my arms say: two are one
as my feet say: earth upon earth
as my knees say: bow down, unhinge yourself
as my cells say: we repeat the unrepeatable

the book speaks: arrange yourself in the form
that will arrange you

before I was: colours that hurt me
arranged themselves in me

before I was: horizons that blind me
arranged themselves in me

before I was: the dead who speak to me
arranged themselves in me

iv

I am the mouths
of smiling old men

there rises from me
the scent of orange-blossoms

I speak in the words
of the ancient dead

arranged
in the raging sun
in the stiffening age of days

and in the temple of my house

one becomes another
I am crazed by poetry

The Milk of Paradise

1

Marvel upon marvel the berries of the sun
inflame the tumbling waters of my limbs
I am given to such visions: wide-eyed
luminous men walk through a hairy land
toward a milky glade where goats bleat

2

I put away this last unfinished poem
to think with trouble of a friend
who wrote me and whose words I scorned

Psalm 24

I no longer want to see
those terrible corrections
underlined with the red-ink
of crab-apples bleeding on the lawn.

Take away your Talmudic trees
commenting on the stone Torah of our streets.

Isn't it enough that I've failed?
Do you have to indulge in this melodrama
of snowstorms and black poppies?

What did you expect?
You, who drove me to mad alphabets
and taught me all the wrong words.

It's your scripture. You read it.

To a Friend Who Sued the Mayor and Lost

seeing the pin-points of his mind
dance on the angels of his soul
I knew he hated politics,
political men, and government

turned statutory by his hate
he became street-codes,
agendas of garbage-men

I read the sentence of his face
his hanging hands
the text of justice on his pores
sweating its way through yet another cell

oh blind and crying mother
when you ate your child
did you think such a feast
would raise this clamour in our streets?

he is newsprint now
all crimes blacken his limbs
the switch-blade of his tongue cuts blood
from each crazed beautiful mouth
that I would put my mouth upon,
thinking no more of politics

The Burning Man

I burn every other word in the journal
but I still can't understand what it means
if I murder the editor
only when he's stuffed with cheese

maybe I'll shove him into a barrel of herring
or shove a barrel of herring into him
anything, anything
                                        help me, I cry
to a whole parliament of robins
let us sing together, let us save our country
but they go on divorcing worms

I think I'll send kerosene-filled ambulances
like the exploding painless flowers of napalm
in a dream of street fights and bombings
racing down school corridors and hospital wards

will no one listen to me
I'm a walking crime wave

I go down on my knees
                                                  I pray
to the living room chair
                                                  remember

once we were heroic
we used to embrace
you spoke to me
                                        does it count for nothing
that we wept together over the vulnerable
beautiful flowers in our furnace

but all the firemen have drowned

perhaps I'll harm only a few birds
a rabbit, a deer slower than the others,
one who stumbled, her eyes like torches,
her mouth as wide as any child's

Streetlights

they're not sunflowers
yet they burn on their stems
like the golden eyes of those other plants

and they bend
in such an iron complaint
toward the street's inverted sky

I'd like to think
they know as much of final things
as any living creature who endures the dark.

Neither Here nor There

somewhere, I'm told, in fields darker than sleep
browse dreaming beasts with huge unhurt eyes
while walnut-coloured men in far-off wind-swept voices
revolve their prayers as if they were wheels or stars

it isn't that way: one by one my poems fall apart
something like a cooked onion
                                        in the next house
a window opens once
                                        you wouldn't believe
what my blonde neighbour said
                                        anyhow
next year the carnival will be bigger
they say they've got a real live junkie in a rage

Galaxy

Reading Warnock: *Ethics Since 1900*
in my 42nd year
                                and x-eyed at McLuhan's
Galaxy I must look to my morals.
Pay attention! You think I'm maundering.
Some days the October sun lays yellow pine
along this framework of time
                                                        as if
a wall-eyed carpenter thought to build
lighthouses in Edmonton.

My tweeds wrinkle at the notion.
But I have wanted to be a good man.
It's this silence in the inner ear
of my aphorism
                                disturbs me.

Signatures

I have seen the need for the occult
in the eyes of lovers and mothers.
Gardens recently frighten me, grunts
from earth, deep growing things.
I think of Schweitzer dead at last,
his organs mutilated by those roots.
As for the tumult in the streets,
there are knives in water, in taps,
and once I took up from the tracks
beside the water-tower in my town
a huge beet, hairy and huge, that lay
in my hands like an under-water thing.

Thugs rampage. Marines draw down the head,
ancient and tight, her hair in ecstasy,
some Viet-Nam woman who had loved deeply
or who'd wept over her gunman son,
draw down into a pool that head
I've seen in paintings where there was no blood.

What scream issuing from the page
darkens my difficult, philosophic mind?
The room is alien: threats uttered
where only the print and I engage
our locked dialogue.
                                        Out of the blind
years, remotely, as in earth stirred
by slugs or worms, heaves a memory
of beets and roots; things unuttered
and unutterable, echoing out of print,
out of streams, a signature of rage.

And carnal knives dipped in the water rise.

Crusoe

1

Greek men dance alone.
The Hebrew yells at stone.
Others eat glass.
Name your own vice, Englishman.

2

The snail's trace:
doubtful words.

Do not ask how I have come
to the exact madness of silence
or what my keepers name
this frenzy of compliant sense.

Paper and fire,
their attraction, their similarity,
ceremonious script.

The dancer alone in his dance
utters the terrible sound of his limbs.

This was written for a foundling,
alien, Greek, Hebrew,
to the memory of my sane parents,
in order not to go mad,
and for my keepers' sake,
that I might learn
singular love

no other is to blame.

A Winter Thought

snow-trees or
one tree of snow

and footprints or
someone was here

I think

later they ran from
the white forest

to what
beach where dark
men bathe and lift

out of the blue water

burning?

The Trance of Poetry

My children frightened, I quarrel with my wife,
And all that passes through my raging mind,
This poem I must write
                                        lovers, entranced,
Will whisper mouth to mouth my lines

I put the difficulty down to god
Who failed to be unambiguous in such matters

Statue in the House

I suppose memory is like this african idol
brooding over his book
                    forever unable
to turn the fixed pages

he looks to be a boy
or an old man with a boy's face

I wonder what he reads
so intently
          in those black pages

what bright substance could have charred
his tight fists
          his small clenched eyes?

That Other Psalm

would you say god like
a mirror shines
supple as light in water

I dont know
if drowning
          poetry
a bad habit I guess
I'd rhyme my way down

being defeated
I think I'd praise
difficult lost metaphors

Girl on a High Wire

Do you think I'd sit here staring
if I knew how to invent chair-lifts
or lacked this odd taste for vertigo?

What if I dare you to jump, saying, ah
my hurt bird, I will catch you—
and if I weren't there (someone calling,
my son pointing at camels or wanting
to pee) when your eyes became horizons?
Or if you fell
into the well of bankers, mid-wives,
my brother-in-law, the Prudential Life
Insurance Company?
                    I see them,
heroine, hefting you, their applause
ringing your head with the clatter of zircons,
mouths blowing little balloons of praise.

The great globe circles.
Soldiers fall into muddy rivers.
Boys walk the tightrope of their prison yard.

I can no longer look at telephone wires,
the vanishing point of your unfinished portrait.

I shall devote myself to entomology,
practise weight-lifting with dinky toys,
but who will keep me from my crooked prayers,
those mad doves that fling haloes around you?

If Simply to Exclaim

if simply to exclaim
                                        your gaze
is joy
            why does my voice
squeak like a pencil
drawn across a child's blackboard?

The Fox and the Grapes

Fox:
    Last night I dreamed I was Tarzan the Terrible.
    You've no idea of what I do to trees.

Grapes:
    Some say that God is on the vine.
    Others take to drink.

Fox:
    If you want to be empirical
    The fact is I had an upbringing
    Any stomach would be proud of.
    That is what I mean by love.

Grapes:
    The oldest living thing,
    A certain pine in mountain rock,
    Has never uttered any human song.

Fox:
    I just want to live.
    I don't want to be sick.
    I truly would love you.

Grapes:
    Sing me inhuman songs.
    Find me a purple God.
    Admit that you're ludicrous.
    Admit, I'm impossible.

Fox:

Why must you be so indifferent?
What do you want with poetry?
Where is your pity?

Please, stop pretending you aren't grapes,
Only the purple breasts
Of an old, old mother
Who looks like a tree.

I don't want you.
I don't care if I die.
I'd rather be the last hungry
Brutal little fox.

Houdini

I suspect he knew that trunks are metaphors,
could distinguish between the finest rhythms
unrolled on rope or singing in a chain
and knew the metrics of the deepest pools

I think of him listening to the words
spoken by manacles, cells, handcuffs,
chests, hampers, roll-top desks, vaults,
especially the deep words spoken by coffins

escape, escape: quaint Harry in his suit
his chains, his desk, attached to all attachments
how he'd sweat in that precise struggle
with those binding words, wrapped around him
like that mannered style, his formal suit

and spoken when? by whom? What thing first said
"there's no way out?"; so that he'd free himself,
leap, squirm, no matter how, to chain himself again,
once more jump out of the deep alive
with all his chains singing around his feet
like the bound crowds who sigh, who sigh.

The Waggoner's Song

I've learned
                    not to believe
in those hairy monks with their burning trees

                    but that story
about the slain daughter
where we wept in one another's arms
that was good
                        now I know
something more about agony
                                              I know
perfection is a poem I never wrote

one about children
a tree
a curious bird
                        well, there are other songs

Mount Edith

Newspapers over my left thigh
I read the lines that run
out of my groin's least vein,
peculiar hole where Doges died.

My eye-balls are TV screens,
reputations shooting up the town,
greed puddling between knives.

Would you have me say my home was poor,
my research doubtful, my father Jewish?
You suspect me of freedom-rides. Worse:
Dreaming myself at Oswald's gun.

I tell you there are peaks
would deprive you of sense
and in your strangling metaphor
invite you to murders
even I have not conceived.

Demonology

Lips mongering their news of god,
the one who, bearing pain,
taught me meticulous disease,
neatness of my bowels,
and fine brutalities.

I am particular in all things.
Hell, like gossip, is precise.

The Madness of Our Polity

Being savages, we learn to bow and smile
And choke behind our showing teeth
Those howls that echo from the fields of sleep.

I saw this. On the prairies where I lived
a boy who put a needle in a gopher's eye
knew more of civil law than all my friends.

What other emblems do you need?

Whence Cometh Our Help?

Can one take the President by his nose,
lead him to deep waters?

In my town even the Premier
lifts up his eyes unto the wells,
his melancholy voice
a microphone of psalms and oil.

And yet there lives a deep-down freshness
in all things
                    down what alleys
where the hoarse gunmen race,
their tired throats whispering
mercy
          whispering peace.

It is time I sent
all the overdue memos.

                              God,
It is September. Please write.

Scapegoat

Did you expect whiskers? A foul breath?
A tongueful of labels from ripped cans?
Make no mistake. This is the ancient one.

Ask him about love.
Now watch his hand creep to his throat,
Fondle a new jowl as if it were a coin,
Then listen to his wretched shredded voice
Explore the Hebrew words that spell
Nameless beings expelling God.

An Exact Frenzy

Let's discuss hospitals and kidney machines
no, let us rather talk of corners, field-mice,
nests, not nests (my dove with the three-cornered
eyes), perhaps it is kindergartens: crazy-legged
suburban dogs totter toward the urban blurb which
might be either father or mother or God, no? why
do you turn pale, feathers have fallen earlier,
many exceptional doves, loves, heroes,
and mutilated dwarfs have been crushed, nothing
exceptional, trees bleed, the grass is scripture,
and cows eat grass, we eat cows, you are pale,
would you rather we talked of dentists and roots?
Lawn-mowers then? Your brow is furrowed. I am not
gentle. You think you might scream (gulls gather
where there is no sea: the sky turns over; we bathe
together in a bowl of stars; your arms over me
like the milky way) there, I am gentle, though
I see in the colours of my son's reader colours
of his revolution, banging away, bringing down
tall men who fall into small bundles of guns,
mainly plastic. You are disturbed. You think
you are an orphan. There are orphans. See,
I bring you gifts, my love (three-cornered
you look awry at the triple-gifts I bring),
kingly the gifts:
my love which is gunmen
my guns which are mouths
mouths of loud children
intestines and mould
the black dung of a nest
roots, mushrooms
powerful poppies
the legs of a doll
the insides of a doll
when it snows in September there are marriages
none but the very best know there are divorces.

Regina Painters

Mostly they see it as an abstract
Flat as a canvas slashed by lather
Or a bashed-in metal flower.

Never the single-minded whore
Wearing her badge of customers,
A face like grain
                    last harvest
Where the brainless asphalt lies.

In the Fifty-seventh Century of Our Lord

semitic and secret I plan new evasions,
survival, the tribal rite
                              to be
horribly chummy with god
as if he cared
                    in particular
about my politics
my plans for adultery
my marvellous scheme to blame it
on my neighbor's blameless wife

Three Ravens on a Tree

In a dark world where a black sun rises
I have known three crows like judges
Brooding on a tree: one is in my heart
Which beats thickly a dark tide of blood
Whelming in my throat where the second croaks
Malicious words toward the third who draws
With, ah, bent wings across my eyes his claws.

Do not think I ask for pity, Dove,
Whose warm eggs hatch merciful birds.

In Memory of William B. Yeats

My hair a nest of widows
I parade down the halls spraying salt
onto the spry tails of all co-eds,
my colleagues stare, indignant Van Goghs,
while from the Chief's office, steam
rises, the great roller chugs
spitting out furious paper-clips:
a whole daisy-chain of stenographers,
bees bumbling in their hives, rattles
like a typewriter.
                    Tonight
in the sky's filing-cabinet
I discover my unwritten letters,
xerox of the last mss
by an unnamed, doubtless poor, scholar.

Poem

You would have me deny my murderous thoughts.
It is metaphor I distrust.

Pictures in an Institution

1

Notice: all mirrors will be covered
the mailman is forbidden to speak
professors are confined to their offices
faculties no longer exist.

2

I speak of what I know,
how uncle Asher, spittle on his lips,
first typed with harvest hands the fox
across a fence and showing all good men
come to their country's aid rushed off to Israel
there to brutalize his wife and son

how step-grandfather Barak wiped
sour curds out of his curly beard
before he roared the Sabbath in my ears
what Sara, long his widow, dreamed
the night she cried: God, let him die at last,
thinking perhaps of Josef who had lost
jewels in Russia where the Cossack rode
but coughed his stomach out in Winnipeg

Your boredom does not matter. I take,
brutal to my thoughts, these lives, defy
your taste in metaphor; the wind-break
on the farm that Barak plowed to dust
makes images would ruin public poetry.

The rites of love I knew:
how father cheated brother, uncle, son,
and bankrupt-grocer, that we might eat
wrote doggerel verse, later took his wife,
my mother, in the English way beside my bed.
Why would he put his Jewishness aside?
Because there was no bread?

Or out of spite
that doctors sliced his double rupture,
fingered spleen, and healed his bowel's ache?

Lovers lie down in glades, are glad.
These, now in graves, their headstones sunk,
knew nothing of such marvels, only God, his ways,
owning no texts of Greek or anthropology.

3

Notice: the library is closed to all who read
any student carrying a gun
registers first, exempt from fines,
is given thirteen books per month,
one course in science, one in math,
two options
campus police
will see to co-eds' underwear

4

These names I rehearse:
Eva, Isaac,
Charley, Yetta, Max
now dead
or dying or beyond my lies

till I reeling with messages
and sick to hold again their bitter lives
put them, with shame, into my poetry.

5

Notice: there will be no further communication
lectures are cancelled
all students are expelled
the reading of poetry is declared a public crime

Poem

Lately, the polite Chinese paintings on my wall
utter profanities
and yet, no Western man
has set his foot upon those hills
or muddied with his hands that silent waterfall.

The Silences

1

like a blank page
unused
I could write anything:
everything
you've no
way of knowing what
I might say
think
what whispers
before any word spoken

think
all is possible
do you dare
think of the possible silences?

2

the marvellous gods are silent
their wide eyes baffle us

we cannot read their eyes
their impractical calm gestures

in the remote hills
they walk
                noiseless
their footsteps

3

before the possibility
it was impossible

syllables
                I think of your mouth

4

throttles splendid utterance
the unspoken

gathers in harvests

5

when he put out his eyes
he said: I have said everything

you will not hear my voice again

6

what I said became

7

a letter: don't read this
so that what I've said
might not become
                                        anyhow
let us perplex our hearts
with uselessness

8

my friend, goat-footed,
a nimble speaker

his beard bobbles
when he shakes down cities
into the virtue of noble speech

now everyone fears his neighbor

now the words resounding
everyone runs to his home
to stop his ears

now women, like lions, pace our streets

their roaring silences
even the emperor's metal birds

9

think only of the unwritten
all
   a shrine
              of possible

              silences

To One Whom Lore and Frenzy Touch

I would, for that passionate woman,
Declare all ceremony false,
But that she knows what is her own:
her proud truth, my cowardice.

The Front Lines

take that limp root
this crowned fantastic elm
these stones that rise on stones
on other stones to lie

look on the folly of the street
that dwindles into clay

what other emblems can I show?
that snow-blind peak?
this other, blind with snow,
a witless line of rock?

or go
where no masks lie
where, languishing, styles die
that route that no man takes
without his shadowed enemy?

name me finalities:
this one who lashed his love
or that who lashing loved
or one who put his hand into the coals
to smear the bending face of hate
his own, his master's, or his soul's

that other way that no man takes
without his shadowed enemy.

The Permanence of Red Leaves

ledge
of being
over the edge
screams dwindle

a screen sifts
summer dust
summarizes flies

what if there were no pollen
only a mug's game?

Atreus fingered his switch-blade
while his bride chewed thoughtfully

I've seen beasts do nothing more

if blood's Niagara
where's the craft to ride that flood:

Crawford gasping in her King Street room,
or Federation belched at Charlottetown?

To the Children

Everyone today puts on weight. Solid flesh.
Stuffs it in at the mouth. Stuffs it in corsets.
We are heavy with chickens of a 1000 Fridays.
Slaughter is general.

Manner of Suicide

Man, says Menninger, against himself:

"hanging themselves
taking poison in the top of high trees
throwing themselves on swiftly revolving circular saws
exploding dynamite in their mouths
thrusting red hot pokers down their throats
hugging red hot stoves
freezing to death on piles of ice
in refrigerator cars
lacerating their throats on barbed wire fences
drowning themselves head downwards in barrels
suffocating themselves head downwards in chimneys
diving into white-hot coke ovens
throwing themselves into craters of volcanoes
shooting themselves with ingenious combinations of
a rifle and a sewing machine
strangling themselves with their hair
swallowing poisonous spiders
piercing their hearts with corkscrews and
darning needles
cutting their throats with handsaws and sheepshears
hanging themselves with grape vines
swallowing strips of underclothing and buckles
of suspenders
forcing teams of horses to tear their heads off
drowning themselves in vats of soft soap
plunging into retorts of molten glass
jumping into slaughter-house tanks of blood
decapitation with homemade guillotines
self-crucifixion"

"the archaic symbolism of the psychotic"
"The Cremation of Sam McGee"
"the undisturbed bliss of inter-uterine
existence illustrated by fantasies in
the Bible, poetry, casual conversation
of the man on the street, the church hymnal,
newspapers, patients, the writings of Shelley
and Freud"

EVENING SERVICE FOR THE SABBATH: THANKSGIVING FOR GOD'S UNFAILING MERCIES:

> We will give thanks unto Thee and declare
> Thy praise for our lives which are committed
> unto Thy hand, and for our souls which are in
> Thy charge, and for Thy miracles which are
> daily with us, and for Thy wonders and Thy
> benefits, which are wrought at all times,
> evening, morn, and noon.

Messages

1

Message to the Premier: we intend to show foreign films we intend to conduct our classes we intend to copulate nightly we intend to burn our insurance policies we intend to visit doctors who cannot heal us we intend to become demonstrations on television sets and transistor radios we are coming in the night to your farm pray premier pray to your credit companies and to the Treasury Branch explain to your minister of censorship explain to your deputy assistant attorney general we are coming where the spirit moves and as the spirit moves which is the first, the final, the unending inventory of our lives.

2

Message to the Poets of My Country: despicable printers, you are dirty with type, I can no longer read you, come out, show yourselves, get out of those dirty little books, your print, I have followed you through the wretched nights of forty-two years, I have prayed to you, I have sold children and beaten wives, you've no idea of the blood which ran from my hands so that I could write your words, and all is lost, least, soiled, smeared, bleared, blurred, my clowns, my spoiled beautiful girl-boys singing your songs, come with me to the farm of the premier and the house of the prime-minister, let us together set bonfires, let us no longer be syntactical and grammatical, let us unencumbered embrace the grace of our frenzy and recite to children the solved riddles of our being, how we walk upon parapets, how we alone among all creation know the prayers of our extended selves, circling and circling through the ones and zeroes of our extensions, let us be formulaic, together we shall lie down among the numbers and teach ourselves the infinities of our particular extended love.

Woodbine

When a crooked man meets beauty
You think there'd be shouting in the streets

I wish there were no allegories
I wish the doctors could do something about my forked tongue

Believe me, I have gone about with pails on my head
so that my friends would recognize me.

Lord, Lord, pollution everywhere
But I breathe still
                                        and breathless, sweet
woodbine, colour of honey, touches my skin
as if my unbelieving eyes made no difference at all

Song

I will bless the girl with her tattered hands
whose fingers acclaim a rosy crime
that sings in her blood
and in her vessels' lair
hums and hums again.
                                        This time
I will sing happily for the fresh blood
that runs from the nose of Jane
where she lies on the road.
Nobody cares to say where it ends.

For the rotten charms of Timothy
I'll write a joyful song.
Come let us admire his shining pain
and the shining blood of Jane.

In my gleeful song
will I sew and mend
Timothy, Jane, and the rosy hands
that hang from the arms of the tattered one?

When everything is done,
old men can rejoice, being old.
Let me be gay for the girls and boys
broken before me.

Who else will remember their joys?

News from Nowhere

1

I and Thou

Angelo, committed, come from jail,
his rage refreshed
                                        remarks
my disengagement, my despair.

He comforts me: between two evils
choose the least, act with dispatch,
high morals, and your knife.
The negro mobs are guilty too.

I study Buber's dialogue with god.
I press my hands against our sickly elm
and weep to think it cannot speak but kills.

2

Palinode

And then who's to blame?
I put messages in bottles to Germany.
Note: I forgive you, I admire
your coffee-grinders, your bars,
the weight of your recovery.

I promise not to swear at bus drivers.
I will keep strict measure in my words.
I will think always
                                        of clean teeth,
heroism, universal disease.

Joseph

A goat coughs in my chimney.
He had a fine narrow face,
Like a Pharoah's, but now,
Alas, he smoulders odours
Yellow as his teetering beard.

Lunatic the wind sings mildew
Sings mould, into the clumpy grass,
All that's left of the swaggering mane,
The dangerous gold.

Grunt is my cow,
Old bellow the bull
Is a hump and a groan,
All but the horniest parts
Devoured and charred.

Only the backhouse remains,
Where the rodent chirrs,
Where the weed flurries
Its maniac beard.

How shall I lift myself?
Whose mighty hand will raise me up?
This hole breeds favours
Brighter than I ever knew,
And I have dreams to tell the king.

House of Candy

Larches charred still leaning in the swamp,
I stumble here. What do I know of muskeg?
Woodsmen I have met in stories saved young girls.
It was the smoking hearts of casual rodents
They threw before the queen, her clouded eyes.

If I go forward to the blackened tower,
What must I learn about this offering?
How in my bloodless hands will I take blood
Or how appease the queen, her unencumbered arms?

Hunters darkened stare through sullen smoke
As if to see my shape where larches stand
Or find me in the smouldering stump of pine
Or like some candied house, a crystal rock,
Or marvellous and abstract in a cave,
All bearded whisper and prophetic eye.

They do not know how at the story's end,
Duller than prose, I turned toward the south,
Sought out the urgent maiden, warned her of the queen,
Then drove my knife into her heart to save a passing rat.

The Speaking Earth

grandfathers fall into it
their mighty beards muffled in grass

and admirals, the sea-sounding men

lovers fall into the earth
like rain on wet dark bodies

listen, our lady earth flowers
into the sea-green language
of grass and drowned admirals

listen: in bearded branches
clasped like broken hands
admiring birds
lovers singing of their kiss
before and after all the words

Agamemnon's Return

The surgeon's specimen neither denies nor affirms.
You and I should expect in our time suffering, pain.
It is an infirmity of all order.
                                        That there should be
Both the house untenanted and reckless birds
Describing robes around chimneys
                                                neither disturbs
Nor affirms.
                Your weeping, your lament,
Though there is much terror,
                                        do not explain.

I come here to testify
With the witness of birds and houses.

I bring with me sounds
Torn out of curious caves:
                                    a chair crying like a man
                                    the text-book sound of coffee-tables
                                    lamentation of sofa and coffee.

Do you not see I walk now
On an ocean of tablets
Dispensed by a child who was split on a rock?

Even the sweating utterance of my limbs.

How much thought there is in this rock
I hold between my knees
We cannot ever know.
                                It is time
We went together into the last testimony

And made of each other great disorder.

A Season of Loves

There's nothing to be learned from broken calendars

I give my Zodiac to an old man
because he no longer understands letters
nor knows he sits beneath a walnut tree

It is your wrist teaches me
how birds sustain earth, its history

and from the archeology of your palms
I discover Theban loves, Minos

I receive the entrance of your eyes

as the sun does

Meditation on the Papyrus of Ani

sparrows discovering my eyes
leave me undisciplined

a trouble to my family

my soul, my indolent soul
why have you not learned the 66 names of god?

From the North Saskatchewan

when on the high bluff discovering
the river cuts below
send messages
we have spoken to those on the boats

I am obsessed by the berries they eat
all night odour of Saskatoon
and an unidentifiable odour
something baking
the sun
never reaches the lower bank

I cannot read the tree markings

today the sky is torn by wind:
a field after a long battle
strewn with corpses of cloud

give blessings to my children
speak for us to those who sent us here
say we did all that could be done
we have not learned
what lies north of the river
or past those hills that look like beasts

Letter to Be Opened Later

Tell them I did not vote Liberal
though I have taken bribes.
I want them to know that secretly
I admired the old red flag.

If they ask about our gods
explain I did pray to the angels
by all their right names:
                              Mr. President
Your Worship, Dear Sir, Your Honor.

Listen:

I've told my analyst everything
except the bit about the girl student.

I don't know why the inspector threatens me
with letters rimmed in awful red.

Woman in the Moon

none but a nation left so crazed
by distance or deranged by time
would think she is remote

more foolish still I think she is
that fire in a blazing sea
some mad aegean once cried out to hold

The Moon in All Her Phases

I'd say, in the old manner:
she imagines our existence,
its changes, illusions

well, luminous times are gone
most of my friends quarrel
drink
        are not, though satyrs,
lordly
          recently one in rage
told me he loved the first war
because they sang such songs

we grope toward each other
hands fumble among clothes

I cant remember:
                                did your eyes
your body glow?
                              I cant remember
the difficult lovely words.

The Explanations of the Moon

the explanations of the moon
are uncompromisingly lucid

so some say she is cold

but having known her fire
how she lives in deep water
lingers in hollows
                        and
like my friend who mad
with drugs or drink loves
luminous seas but not his
family
          induces what we
say are dreams
                    I'm
no longer sure
                    when
she assumes horizons
or
   beyond us
                    crazes
whole nations
                    so that
they drive engines
toward her
                  no I cant
say for certain
                    why
we, love, sometimes
smile and know each other
and why we change
and why
           our eyes clear
we are struck dumb

remote, I think,
isnt the word

Mourning Women

sodden with light
he imagined the sun itself wet
and athlete in the waves

the sea-animals
crisp in fire

only the groans of beset women
watching that body rise

where their sons had weltered
with blank eyes in the green pool

Listen, the Sea

yes what is
I'm learning

by your leave
leaving
rising
to leave
return
and turn
we
deliberate
by the waves
rhythm casual
move
tidal
as
traffic
as
the sea-women

neither are they
certain uncertain
but with us
withal
within
their song
here
oh hear
it is

In Many Waters Sea-Horses Stand

sea-horses wooden and decorate
and something
                    either
green or red or

since I dont know
about colour under

what I drown in

and whether you
or others
            (I'd say
many wise natural
words)
            like sea-horses
stand in deepness

nor do they move
as the waves move us
toward each other and
away from each other

so let us unnatural
embrace
            if only
the green water

            if only
our own unspoken
deep standing

Marina

Because she spoke often of the sea we thought she had known
another country, her people distant, not forgotten

We did not know then who was calling her or what songs she
listened to or why the sea-birds came to rest
upon her long fingers

Or why she would shudder like a sea-bird about to take flight,
her eyes changing with the changing light

As the sea-changing opal changes, as a shell takes its
colours from the sea as if it were the sea

As if the great sea itself were held in the palm of a hand

They say the daughters of the sea know the language of birds,
that in their restless eyes the most fortunate learn
how the moon rises and sets

We do not know who is calling her or why her eyes change
or what shore she will set her foot upon

Variations on an Essay by John Cook

I pick up the clews you have left lying around
like soiled underclothes

I can't tell what happened and what did not

or why it is you stand at the end of a long corridor
tiny as a doll inside a house inside a house
which is in a play where everything happens as a doll
says it will happen
                        your hair is musical

and in the book it says:

                                this is how the city burned
                                at the end of tapers of hair
                                its towers lady-like and refineries

it says further:

            there were no exhumations
            but it is known there were deaths
            how else did the trees grow in those shapes
            and why are the women all in black

I climb on the tree as if to be its sounds
I climb into the darkness of the tree
I climb into the corridor where you are so tiny;
and beside enormous egyptian gods
with heads of hawk and dog and crocodile
I see you are putting pins in eggs

                                your hair is singing
                                happily and at random

and the leaves fly from all the random trees
where it says in the book "like leaves flying"

The Apology

I take back my apology:
the table the hassock were not moved
the radio opens its great ears
to assassinations, weathers, sinkings
but its four white eyes do not blink
its clock goes round
I want to connect with the radio
I want to put its plugs in my ears
and hear my throat announce that even
Boston is winning
I want the table to appreciate my
delight in its leaves: I will stand on
four legs and try hard to be wooden
and brown with folding leaves
I will fold and unfold my leaves
like a wooden butterfly
and birthday cards can be put on me
I will support birthday cards and letters
demanding rooms in hotels/ and typewriters
connecting tables and stars
I will love the light olive of the Olivetti
if necessary I will drink olive oil
I have no objection to becoming an olive myself
even in a martini
even a bugged martini
but though before my spread hands
though before the blessings and welcomes
in the fake Hebrew gestures I make to
the world
though my agony neither burns nor moves
tables and radios/ and my love does nothing
oh nothing to change them
I'm not going to apologize
I take back all the sorry clowns I tried to give you
(I will give them to you again, being a dream of Chaplin and
the short-haired girls who flicker in his hunch-backed gaze)
because you are not the table or radio
because you are not the idea of an olive or an olive
or an olive's idea of itself

because I can be tables but not you
and all the words fall hopelessly at your feet
like the bad idea of a plastic bouquet in hot weather
or the new kinds of toys which never quite fit in their parts
or that Zeppelin, Mad magazine once tried to make me make
and it couldn't not only not fly it couldn't be put together
to fly though I managed the first three parts of a Voop
which is a great mouth and one foot and things hanging around
the mouth and foot
                    let me work hard at becoming tables or radios
                    I will be precise and they will continue
                    as if I weren't there at all

Cosmos, the Giant Rose Flower

I

Yesterday in my garden I broke
the way bones might break in traffic
Cosmos, the giant rose flower

and when she lay like a yellow old marble
uprooted on a Greek island

and when broken she lay to be broken

and when I took up into my hands
the great slow black slugs
trailing their grease along her deep stem

Cnossos
Delphi
Mycenae
TEEN AGE SEX
CRIMES ANGER JUDGE

I didn't know about his anger
my own rose in me like a rose
my anger at 24 frames per second
flickered as it licked up
frame upon frame
the dropped words
the judge
(when he flew over the rapes
and whips of his case
in his deep chambers)

dropped:
INDECENT ASSAULT

and I began to accuse myself
in the sentence of my anger
that flowered in me like a broken Cosmos

II

the bridge is
its suspension
denies black water
a phenomenal moon
deprives shadows
move then as if
moon bridge shadow water
differ
          and do not
differing
               touch

III

a

like the rider under whose horse's hooves
a dream of sand and water moves
as he moves and dwindles
                                        space

crouched like a dreamer
under the sun that pours yellow and rose
over the hardening leaves
hardening trees
                         and the hard moon

I place a metaphor
into your wide-spread groans

do you coast onto the lost shores of Lapland
while I speak in your body with my verbs' fingering
my tonguing nouns, the closing, unclosing
clauses of my limbs?

lapsus-linguae:
we ride such horse-eyed betrayals
to a horizon of Tibetan prayers
shaped in a mist of monks and mountains

until the last tree enters us
and we break on our boughs
the hard horses of language

b

unhooked telephones
having heard too much
lie buzzing in the empty air

everywhere
through Greece
fields of bees
and hived golden
suns
combing their flowery hair

IV

even the smallest room
defines
          how we might be
without enclosing space

I praise
            private
secret touching

STONY PLAIN

Stony Plain:

Village 25 miles west of
Edmonton, Alberta

Band of the Assiniboine Tribe,

Reservation south of Lake Wabamun

Estevan, 1934

remembering the family we
called breeds the Roques
their house smelling of urine
my mother's prayers before
the dried fish she cursed
them for their dirtiness their
women I remember too
                                        how
seldom they spoke and
they touched one another

even when the sun killed
cattle and rabbis
                        even
in the poisoned slow air
like hunters
                like lizards
they touched   stone
they touched
                        earth

Wabamun

1

lake
holds
sun moon stars

trees
hold
stars moon sun

2

thunder
and sky
towel
wet sand
in yellow light

yesterday

3

on water
many suns
here there
fires then
silent comedians
gulls
perch jumping

4

only
    waves   motion
    sun   dancing

no   sun

only
     light
hurting
in its
     endless
dance

5

each day I
step
    farther
into dark water

once I will
know
     no longer

whether
        that one
floating
        is myself
or the light
             one
standing
        on the red
pier

6

moon train on causeway

coal cars

                    a white moon

7

to have come to this
simplicity
                  to know
only
        the absolute
calm
        lake

        before

        night

8

smell of clover
like sweet stars in a green sky

white sweet stars
blossom in a green sky

stars like clover
in a white sky

white
          stars

At Wabamun the Calgary Power Station

leans white in the moon
light puts white slabs up
light shanty whiteness leans

as if it owned the land

daytime horses crop grass
unknowing transformers hum

transformers   at the word
it takes on fiery hair
blazing it transmits
messages furious and hairy
it sends and receives from stars
ancient planets   people
who speak like horses new words

then sparks perform dead
parabolas and loops die
fireplace quietens it is
morning it is light only
the power the power hums

and the lake grows green
again in sunlight
                                it is
morning algae and weeds
thicken
                the green lake
wobbles
                we look at
each other   alien forms

Susanna and the Indians

no question she was
tough and probably
frightening like
flash powder/I think
after-images/parents
floating in Jack Chambers'
Messengers Juggling Seed

and that other place wabamun
where an indian woman or
it could be   a man
eyes bruised   stares
at streets
               is it
how easily a camera kills
makes me praise poetic sensitivity?

Lake Wabamun: Summer 68

and all the limp, incurious men
my compatriots
                teachers, poets
clerics
        when poems flicker
behind their eyeballs
like the aura epileptics
say they see unbidden
bending like poplars
at the whisper of thunder
rumouring students
rifling private secret files

trouble themselves like wavelets
thrown by a casual craft's
turbulence moving
                      small
pebbles only
a savage one dark summer
sifted in idle augury

look a last time
at frogmen and gilas
their webbed hands

reflect
        amphibious
monsters, children
ransack your cities
taught this alien
reckless spasm
neither you nor I
polite summarists
knew poems convulsed

Edmonton, 1967

as if by Colville
I mean “hard edge”
stucco   white wall
gravel &
            legs
in one direction shadows
leaning & midget
above the pavement narrows
rapid as the river
                        everything
disappears
              neatness: axiomatic
              houses   here
now gone
              “You are impatient
with poetry” my friend writes
from Iceland

Oil Refineries: Edmonton

squat
       (are)
and there
              fraction-
ary silver re-
flections   flat
distillation
(silver) in
flat
eye
     pulled side-
-ways a slit in
the mind (&) all

a line   against   some
poem
         not   there

Pastoral

yes as in French films
Gabriel Albicocco's *Le Petit Matin*
how can one forget the beautiful morning

horses plunge through water
remove sweat from your thighs
but believe Germans will come
uniform shining leather rites

how lovely to forget
how luxurious
                we bathe
we atomize ourselves

it is the shampoo
lathers her lathers the horse

and each hazy beautiful morning
ah the Jews trudge wearily
patient meticulous rabbis
their curls their luxurious beards

down between lombardies
between plane trees
elegant tall
            trudge
the Jews   each to his
small cabin small crib

lathered
          the Jews
          the Jews

can we not continue with
this business of love

and the aromatic morning
breathing their dead smoke

your eyes gold
I think only of mercy

Two Dog Poems

1

dogs in their boxes
circle before they sleep

in the houses of Calgary
which keep
                    the bare hills
upon which dogs sleep
                                        in
their circle of boxes

sometimes I think hills
upon the bare breast of Calgary
excite those milk-white cowboys
                                                        who
milk this bursting sky
                                    but
the dogs the dogs keep
the great circle of their sleep

2

on the coffee table coloured
comic books but the dogs anyway
run through the pages
                                    between
wizards their shining feet

it was the commander's voice
that part in Mozart's play
where the record player goes fuzzy
and between sounds
                                looking
straight at us as if time
stopped the servant girl sang

only
        and I had never noticed
this before she was black

Simulation

we're sorry we cannot
at this time bring
you live
            from
the moon's surface
live transmission

meanwhile we transfer
from the landing area
live to a simulation
of the national medical
programme for
                        healing
cancer

          now you are
looking at a simulated
cancer cell through
a simulated microscope

that dark spot on
the biochemist's cheek
we believe to be a real
live melanoma
                        brought to
you
      in living colour

Reading Room: Periodicals

(also in the annotations of Borges)

seeing he was blind, said: please
clarify systems involved in voice over
and the animation of Walter Cronkite
said in voice over this event is random
do not accept do not accept
if the seal is broken the unidentified
black object or the unidentified green

and after this looked: a door opened
and a voice said—it was a voice
like Dustin Hoffman's playing Jack
Crabb the oldest man in the world who
really killed Custer said I will give
you a book and in voice over said
do not accept if the seal is broken

and a voice said
                                this is an
autoclock transcript abridged version
this is
            a random event stop clock stop
clock   there has been a real
time loss subject has given uncodeable
response
                end
print
          end print
          no change
          programme

                                ends

Two Dream Songs for John Berryman

1

Henry, it says to me here
you took yourself to a bridge.
And you, weary and wavery,
walked, bone and brain, all
to the rail
          there perched
waved farewell from rail

Is that how it was done?

Is it only possible to live
how we have done backwards
dreaming our way from death to
bony life?
          Well, it was gaily
done
     but, here on the coast of Spain,
heartsick like you
                    and hurt too
by burning poems that will not write
themselves I
             say
now fare-you-well
with Sylvia, Ted, Randall,
and all your hurt friends,

God notwithstanding

2

It is done but not done well
Henry   to betake yourself to ice
and death in a Minnesota morning

or a bruise
throwing yourself from bridge
to ice
          why would you want so
to say to me or to God once more
that nothing is fair
among fair women and hardy men

to God
          who never once cared
now name him as you will

it's both night and day
not done well to you or anyone
less or better
                    not well

Rembrandt

blunt
        he knew
solidities
            darkness
light
        all those men
        in "The Night Watch"

what it was they saw
in the nooks of their view

but why then
the apostle's style

and why
            the Jewish bride
untouched
                    her groom
handling her breast

her lower gown

redder than the darkest ruby?

Snake Charmers

(in memory: A M K)

one, toothless, twirls his gown
around an aroused cobra's eye
another whips his own Medusa head
at an alarmed serpent
                                        here
Djemma el Fna, marketplace,
my childhood rises in that charmer's eye,
silks, spices, glittering coins, candied cakes,
all sway before me in this man's vertigo,
his mad mouth frothing at the snake's tongue,
his song, asides to casual drummers and to flutes,
his sideway's step as quirky as the serpent's
lunge, strike like an old flint, an old lamp,
a wick
            Abraham Klein, Irving, Leonard,
you and I could once have sung our songs
here before these snakes, those Arab men
and for these same Jews from Paris or
New York
                  Baghdad   Teheran   Jerusalem
Fez
       tales of the prophet and his magic horse

while wretched   blind   crippled
through eternal mellahs crawl
Jew upon Jew
                         the world's
great serpents
                         from that darkness
dazzled
              how

by chance   or graceful song

For Jimmy Hendrix and Janis Joplin

it isn't poetry that matters
I'd rather
        there were holes
in this page through which
I could still see you
off at the corner of the TV
lapping the universal crevice

or if not you
at least just to scramble
the syntax and let this
become prose or holes
in the sound I'd call
silence if my own blood stopped
racing
    say
        Gamel Abdul Nasser
I mean the magical
names: the dead motorcyclist
another king of speed and arabia

while my countrymen as
bluff Layton would say
stuff tissues and tampons in
their eyes and noses so they
will not hear
          the hole sound
thing from the
            hole in the room
that goes out into spaced places

the room in 2001
where you hear yourself eat — eaten

the sperm in the eyelid
                                        the bone
symphonic and Jimmy's own
organ   mouth
and how Janis you
know your mouth
                              from
a hole in the ground

that emptiness is a sound

your mouth wrapt around mouth
tongue to lip
                  to lap
down
        all the whiskey-coloured
nights your staggering cry
where in the dark hole
of his own night Hendrix hung

I loved you Janis
as I love those whom terror seized
for its own poetry: Roethke and Agee
Dylan, Crane, Jarrell, and Sylvia
dead at last in the oven of her own head
not those whom politics silenced or made well
nor the killers on horizons who make guns
their songs and celebrate the will
but drunk, crazed, doped, defeated
by the wild mistake that believes its own art

            now Angels will hammer the mob
            without shelter we move un
            clear into new headlines
            our heads in far places
            police stating the lanes
            staking the hideout's face

sexual strings gather
no   vote   the elect
move elsewhere in proud   palaces

space   encloses   closes
the eye
camera now
the eye is headline
you no longer
with us
we can see through
being   ourselves less visible

only the grain of your uttering
cries
where there might have been

black planets

white dwarves

the harvesters sharpen their knives

Feedback

feedback
feedbacfeedback
feedbafeedback
feedbfeedback
feedfeedback
feefeedback
fefeedback
ffeedback
feedback ack
feedbackackback
feedbackackbackack
ack
backbackack
backaback
acback
bback

Plaza Mayor

because ghosts
will not leave
my wife
my children
I play
and replay
the International
Herald Tribune's
last
report on the Petrosian-Fischer
game for the right to play Spaasky
for the world championship
and notice
once more all the moves are wrong
at least as the american press tells it

and for that right the young american
his people at war
wants   new air
light
more money
better hotel rooms

and I'm still cheering for him
for Brooklyn and Forest Hill
against Ukrainia or Bessarabia
or North Moscow
this place
nervous as a lizard   as if
the cockaded police   the Generalissimo
remembered   the classic square
the king's move   I turn
to *Man's Hope*
agony
whatever I might choose to say
remains
abstract
here
wherever it is that dark comes
ignoring
families

Desert Words

nothing to say except
Williams' words
to end "The Desert Music"
remember
          "I am a poet! I
am, I am, I am a poet. I
reaffirmed, ashamed"

worth   smaller
measure now this voice
time   beside
dying self   child
hulks of spain

I am
     I am
          place echoes

lost words
          "sometimes
to record it"

Autobiography

every night I dream I have
wakened to find someone else
has written and published
my autobiography
made of tapes of my own voice
in words I have never spoken

Pioneer 10

when the plaque arrives
male female star and sun
it will be ours
                    and
as foretold all
will begin again:
                         war
loveliness and
man's desire

when the plaque arrived from outer space, we took it
to the aerospace plant where our astronomers, Sagon
and Drake, were working on the final installation of
the plaque for Pioneer 10 to indicate where our robot
ship had come from and who its builders were—and
compared it with ours: two figures, one male, one
female, an atom, pulsars, a solar system, the robot's
course
            it's ours, they said, and looked again at
the one being installed in the robot, and thought
of Plato's year and turned again to welding nuts and
bolts

Angels in Poems

an old man with heavy wings
in Stevens' poem, in Gabriel Garcia Marquez'
Leaf Storm
stumbles
now in my poem
how else
explain that each day unfolds
like an egyptian calendar

old women in black
no longer gather olives

trees blossom
my neighbour's wall
progresses at el capistrano
typico Jaen will be built

do you call that fiction?

angel, you despair
but being merely written
we can say nothing to you

Voyage to Jupiter

and if it wasn't "measured"?

        much easier I suppose
        to say nothing
                                    only
        the programme continues

technically of course
no disaster
                    but you know
now your own definition
no longer serves

        Emanations then?

no
    simply presence

later
        all space
collapses   messages
return unanswered
or with marks we cannot read

The Death of Don Quixote

ghostly as a line of print
he topples from his bone place
every night a drawn-out passing
death heavy as language
                                        it is
the cause   the word   to be
only the word

olive wood burns, almond blossoms
red land of spain and underfoot
path over olive grove grey
slate but on the hilltop red again
as blood is red and iron in the sun's
hot age
            here they burned books
it is why Velasquez learned style
as we know in our own besotted place
Indian towns with French rulers
pretence of elegance and snow
biting at nose and teeth, style

burned into us   unlike others
who could kill   who could cure
wind sores rude bruise of frost
the dream wired to the dreamer's head
like a space-mask   eyes beyond sight

an iron time   survival
a style learned in the light
of our own extinction
                                        "If I have
addressed this incorrectly
will you forgive me?"
                                        "Penitence?
It is late." Permit me rather
this folly before in iron flame
upon your roadstead burns

not just spain

but all places
                        written of

Don Quixote Writes to His Priest

neither their books nor magicians
offer harm to our person or travellers

once a skinned rabbit alarmed us
as did a lamb's head chucked on the road
all its flesh wounded and
but one eye remarking sadly
the quick feet of passing men

they flavour their tea with shiba
mint leaves, rough sugar in lumps,
and take it with almond cakes

nothing in their medinas offends

yet each night someone pours smoking
dreams into my ears and nostrils

when my mouth opens
only arabic scribbles emerge

who turns my folded thoughts
back and forth   like
the pages of an unreliable book?

Oscar Wilde

my warden stares   counting again
clenched anxieties
                    worn
arguments crumbling reassurances
I've stolen from my day's ration

he looks oddly at the rose-red city
ruined inside my head
                    he measures
gaps opened by earthquakes in my skull

later he will prod at pigs
turn over one by one dazed hungers
squirming desires

would you now say to my people
the poems were worth it?

take these coins for my children
and say after
          it was art I cared for
and despised life

Ark Poem

every night my body
floats light figures

boat-like they rise
the hierophants

their red sexual fingers

their cold questions
about Blake's Four Zoas
about the return
to orthography

unbearable angels
when they rise
I wake to thoughts
of deep water
                    sinkings

Canto

what I was promised I have not seen
no man in the stars no fiery brand
once an old woman ugly and tedious
as night limping beside a gate
prayerful couples nibbling words

the synagogue worm-eaten
grasshoppers flying
sky shaking with their glitter

I have nothing to hide
                    if it were
true I would say so the words
the preacher spoke rattle in my ears
like dried kernels
like grain shaking in dry fields

fields burn and are not burned

Ezra says:
        sunset
            and the grasshopper flying

Saskatchewan Surveyor

at a correction line
he reads the wind's grammar

rhetoric falls from trees

in a simple sentence of land
a disappointed syntax

Argonauts, the CNE, etc.

with Herb on Saturday high on
grandstand and over roller
coaster still frame of lake
and tower coal barge begins
field force metre and rhyme as
downfield run or diagram

double blue abstract hits
striped abstract hits large
striped abstract falls and
scores:
            females hug their
wands
          saturday poem continues
next line downfield where
balls kicked
                    wan bruised
limps to an end
                          removes
larger than self a
hip thigh shoulder glob
ular head and
                      diminish
as lights go out here
and in every green field
force   poem ends
                              traffic

The Dogs of Nerja

and the neurotic dogs
and the dog star
and the wheels in the sky

the prophet: his head turned
his beard streaming like the stream
stars make in multiple exposures
and from his mouth
                                        a balloon
and the words engraved

multiple man
                        how much agony can you endure
                        would you say
                        does it really matter
                        that sage renews itself
                        that thyme becomes green once more

                        and almond trees blossom

Samson

killing

again

he said he thought it was God
but remembered his father
the old quarrel
                    law
the dark family
                    for that
collosal
          became monstrous

thus god   thus vision
thus in starlight
figure of a lion

sweet astrology

In Memory of Albert Camus

Camus: a headlight
in his chest broken
abstract tree

the road's focus
the road's intent
the road's abstraction
Camus: a road

in Saskatchewan, animal
blood
        slain cattle
        flung in pits
by Lumsden in a valley
roads leading to cattle pits
where slain cattle lie
miles from the beach
its bank and shoal
white with abstract tree

galaxy-city-beach
turning turning
              over a road
              where Albert Camus lies
              a headlamp in his eye

between the dagger
and the disease
between the dagger
and the stars

              desert: stumps
              of blind men (headlights
              in their eyes)
                                  know
              flowering daughters, know
              rose-flesh cactus girls

love
      heroism   says Camus

For Ann: On the Question of Franco's Successor

above me three ochre terraces
olive trees design another cliff
amid concrete, wood, new apartments
workmen sing flamenco   casual
passionate
ochre land
red
land   slate mountains
yellow birds   day
sky   yellow as a finch
moon   looks
at a whitewashed house on a hill

is a great leap forward necessary
are fortunes to be made at a red bridge

we have felt our own colour, skin
in sun morning and moon night and

satisfied (we say) we see
land   sea

knowledge no longer a burden

we know freedom
songs

Locality

new year's eve my friend from Utah
remarks a cubist view of our village
from his apartment
                    church
pine tree
          white tilted homes

"*our* village" I said

it was the need for art
made me greedy about lives
knowing nothing of their homes
or for that matter
                    our own

but it was cold
and our children made loud noise
driving out even these desperate spirits

late   alone   I remembered
it was not Spain but Estevan,
that home, I meant

Angelo's Wall

look: social justice is distraction
it comes out unequal with or without
evil men systematic changes order
disorder though you would have me   declare
myself for or against good
                                        here the sea is
blue the roof tiles orange the walls white
two workmen, one young, ruddy with beer I'd
say the other never quite able to straighten up
argue the consistency of mortar the curve
an arch should make over my Italian-American
neighbour's pseudo-Moorish wall
                                                    clouds move
against the mountain wall three   helicopters
turn (toward Algeciras?) these two
continue amiable intricate talk

as if this nation had no other history
and over there, war planes were not busy
with usual and unusual kinds of murder

Narrative Poem

the point is
the story
that
one no one
told

and yet
cattle
on lean flanked
land leaning
toward plain

and yet
shacks
coal fire
despair
the
barbed wire
wolf willow
river ice

but never
a third act
plotting

end or
even

beginning

land
and long
land
and
land

as with Aunt Adeline
the one with the large bosom
one of the complicated cousins
who on a hot Regina afternoon
wept at a hurt finger
and thrust into her vagina
other fingers

so eating one another worm
knows inside another worm
the square root Adeline knew
and cousins knowing cousins
uncles uncles
aunts aunts

it goes on
wisdom of cells

this rod dividing into that
rod into that code that code

so it was with Aunt Eda
who coded Uncle Lou
who had himself been coded

into

and father knew father
mothering the last of the jews
who on the Hirsch land
put in new seed
and new codes
and new aunts

so we survived
but had become
being as
we were

solutions

the seed

the new seed

final solution

remember forever the neon
Orpheum(?) Winnipeg 1935
lights exploding liquid
oh the elegant lobby
uncles and lights lights lights
then
    film

Agatha Christie

being civil she saw poison
as a flaw in character
and the use of a knife
a case history in Freud

difficult to explain
her dislike of jews

or why night upon night
she plotted solutions
to deaths she must have dreamed

her 200,000,000 readers
how much longing for murder
the neatness of England
is and still remains

though in Belfast, say,
bombs have other reasons
and no one explains

Message from Saturn

I have not forgotten
their camps   ovens
electronic dentists curators
surgeons newspapers genital
prongs   their devices

now the unmemory
the forgetting

knowing this witness
no other testimony

see they approach
children not knowing

how the planet burned
and from what star strangers came
their eyes their helmets
mask of turtle

children my children
welcome them
sing war songs old songs

Chief Dan Kennedy

when he was eighty
anthropology
impressed him
also memory

now at one hundred
he remembers
his dark wife
her silence

night night
what reason
what delight
either bed
or waking
could excuse

and down there
yes there the same
village whores
his people ours

he showed me
past
        English journals
with maps
pictures of Indians

On the Death of Ho Chi Minh

toward the end
he became frail as rice paper
his beard whispering thin ideograms

how unlike the great carved storm
that was Marx's face
                                        how unlike
the darkness and fury
in Beethoven's head
                                      scarcely
anything to be consumed

bombs destroy   destroy
you cannot touch his body now
or burn his poems

For Elie Weisel

bear witness: live it all
again content though source
be pitch and sewer
                                    boneyard
skull place   golgotha

but what if jew
is only the german's
bad dream
                  you
pace through camps
at the world's end
beyond the horizon's barbed wire
close to the sun
                              endless oven

First Political Speech

first, in the first place, to begin with, secondly,
in the second place, lastly

again, also, in the next place, once more, moreover,
furthermore, likewise, besides, similarly, for example,
for instance, another

then, nevertheless, still, however, at the same time,
yet, in spite of that, on the other hand, on the contrary

certainly, surely, doubtless, indeed, perhaps, possibly,
probably, anyway, in all probability, in all likelihood,
at all events, in any case

therefore, consequently, accordingly, thus, as a result,
in consequence of this, as might be expected

the foregoing, the preceding, as previously mentioned

as already stated

Transition Table
from *Learning to Write* by Ernest H. Winter (Second
Revised Edition), Macmillan (Toronto, 1961), p.156

Insomniac

They say Stalin at night
sleepless in the suburbs of Moscow
drew up long lists of enemies

think of that dreadful paper

to be sentenced by the pen
of an insomniac sleep-writing

new stars wheel over Spain
bulldozers cut roads through groves
in Africa moors rule who once ruled Spain

sleepless I pace before barred windows
fake-andalusian arches and toward sea
a Parador only cuts lines against the dark
where dark Greeks and Phoenicians sailed

if it is love that fingers in the mind
wake with a touch
                    curious
I remember only what was lost
plotting my own purges and despairs

On the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz: Memorial Services, Toronto, January 25, 1970 YMHA Bloor & Spadina

the name is hard
a German sound made out of
the gut guttural throat
y scream yell   ing open
voice mouth growl
and sweat
"the only way out of Auschwitz
is through the chimneys"
of course
that's second hand   that's told
again   Sigmund Sherwood (Sobolewski)
twisting himself into that sentence
before us on the platform
the poem
shaping itself late in the after
noon later than it would be:

Penderecki's "Wrath of God"
moaning electronic Polish theatric
the screen silent
framed by the name
looking away from /pretending not there
no   name   no   not   name no

Auschwitz
in GOTHIC lettering
the hall
a parody a reminiscence a nasty memory
the Orpheum in Estevan before Buck Jones
the Capitol in Regina before Tom Mix
waiting for the guns
waiting for the cowboy killers
one two three
Legionnaires
Polish ex-prisoners Association
Legions

their medals their flags
so the procession, the poem gradual
ly insistent beginning to shape itself
with the others
walked with them
into the YMHA Bloor & Spadina
thinking apocalypse shame degradation
thinking bones and bodies melting
thickening thinning melting bones and bodies
thinking not mine / must speak clearly
the poet's words / Yevtyshenko at Baba-Yar

there this January snow
heavy wet the wind heavy wet
the street grey white slush melted concrete
bones and bodies melting slush
saw
with the others
the prisoner
in the YMHA hall Bloor & Spadina
arms wax stiff body stiff unnatural
coloured face blank eyes
walked
with the others toward the screen
toward the picture
SLIDES
this is mother
this is father
this is
the one who is
waving her arms like that
is the one who
like
I mean running with her breasts bound
ing
running
with her hands here and there
with her here and
there
hands
that that is
the poem becoming the body

becoming the faint hunger
ing body
prowling
through
words the words words the words
opening mouths ovens
the generals smiling saluting
in their mythic uniforms god-like
generals uniforms with the black leather
with the straps and the intricate leather
the phylacteries and the prayer shawl
corsets and the boots and the leather straps

and the shining faces of the generals in their boots
and their stiff wax bodies their unnatural faces
and their blank eyes and their hands their stiff hands
and the generals in their straps and wax and stiff
staying standing
melting bodies and thickening
quick flesh on flesh handling
hands

the poem flickers, fades
the four Yarzeit candles guttering one
each four million lights dim
my words drift
smoke from chimneys and ovens
a bad picture, the power failing
pianist clattering on and over and through
the long Saturday afternoon in the Orpheum
while the whitehatted star spangled cowboys
shot the dark men and shot the dark men
and we threw popcorn balls and grabbed
each other and cheered:
me jewboy yelling
for the shot town and the falling men
and the lights come on
and
with the others
standing in silence

the gothic word hangs
over us on a shroud-white screen

and we drift away
                    to ourselves
                      to the late Sunday Times
                          the wet snow
                          the city

                          a body melting

Sea Things

1

out of beige out of
darkness clamped on
its own completion

intestinal tail
shrimp
        thin
darkness of

worm
        shell and
cockle
        pink tongue
extruding of conch

in water
          outside
their bones
ours inside
pink
     extrusions

it is
     beauty always
of those I love
I admire

2

at Emma Lake
there was

John Cage
          lost

  or so he said

and you are

    in Spain

at least
        that is

your own

          story

Political Speech

(for PET)

think: planets turn
moons come into phase and out again
tiny spanish birds rise to their own songs
night comes and goes
in the heavens constellations wheel
and this man speaks

(beyond form
words like gyres
like Kubrick's great globe
its weltschmerz

voices voices

at night they come to me
disguised as clowns
or in their sinister form
as policemen, sisters
asking me again
to plunge down
a great elevator
to take a merry-go-round
whose legs are silk pants

a sewer in my throat

but there are no voices
inside or outside this poem
neither a poem nor an opera
you said
we're losing this now
it no longer makes sense
it isn't going to work

thesis: freedom
antithesis: necessity

if the revolution was about to occur
would the people of quebec rise up

the people of quebec would rise up

therefore the revolution was about to occur

wrong again
it goes another way:
                    since
you always did as I said
                        washed
your speeches   wiped your rhetoric
clean as the parsing in your prose
looked after the creases in your biology
and the intertrigo in your quadrivium
you drew the following circles in the air:

            the nation is rational

                        (wrong)

            america is either good or bad

                        (equally wrong)

            canada is either possible or not

                        (still wrong)

and the possibility?

            only that we are older
            and awake
                    or not

Goya

1

the episode at Trueba: waiting
till clouds cleared so that
he could better see corpses

but what light could have shown
the real madness in that god
swallowing his own child?

ah, gay dancers of Madrid
bowing and posturing before
an endless blue canvas: cloud
tapestry-people   did you know
he created you
                              and these monsters?

2

“the episode at Trueba” from Goya’s painting “may 3rd in Madrid
The firing squad in La Moncloa”:

Isidro, Goya’s servant, tells of the night of the fusillades:

“From that same window my master watched the fusillades with a telescope in his right hand a small-mouthed blunderbuss with a handful of bullets in the left hand. If the French arrive here, my master and I are other Daoizes and Valardes. About twelve noon master said: ‘Isidro, bring your blunderbuss and come with me’ I obeyed him and where do you think we went? Well, we went to the Principe Pio Mountain, where the unburied bodies laid. I remember everything as if it had happened yesterday. It was a moonlight night, but the sky was full of menacing black clouds, one second it was clear, the next dark. My hair stood on end when I saw my master with the blunderbuss in one hand and his notebook in the other guiding me toward the dead bodies. As if he was worried he asked me: ‘Are you trembling, Othello?’ I, instead of answering him ‘I’m trembling like a fennel’ I almost began to cry, believing my poor master had lost his senses, because he called me ‘Othello’ instead of Isidro. Later we sat down on the river bank, near the dead bodies and my master opened his notebook, placing it upon his knees and awaited the moonlight which was temporarily hidden by a large cloud. Something hovered over the river bank grumbling and panting. Me, well, I trembled like quicksilver; but my master tranquilly continued as if it were daytime preparing his pencil and sketch. Finally, the moon shone as if it were daylight. In the middle of the puddles of blood we saw a group of cadavers some open-mouthed others head down, some as if they were kissing the ground, others with their hands bound….”

From *A New Complete Guide to the Prado Gallery*, translated by
Patricia May O’Neill, new edition revised by Myra Finkleman
(Editorial Myfe, S.A. Madrid, 1966), pp.182-83.

The President and the Chairman Meet

1

when great men greet each other
with tea and wine and ceremony
small ones draw close
to guard themselves

2

there will be storms
as ever nightfall only
much later moon rising

3

drunkenness, prison, disgrace
a bad book of poems
                                        who distinguishes?

two hundred years old the olive trees
twist under time no worse than ours

4

so many deeds cry out to be done
only the hour waits
                                    and the chairman
and the congress senators
before our great leap forward
before we find again the same
almond trees and the same moon

On the Cultural Revolution

(for my university)

our wheat fields almost empty
have we mined deeply enough
coal   iron   sulphur

but if you would not stoop
work with giant pines
there amid falling trees
think of the Restoration

what articles you might produce
you could clothe a nation

all things written on water
we cannot read the ancient script

Red Guards

(after Jean Luc Goddard)

1

ah! La Chinoise
you are burning Paris
yet you know nothing
of literature
                    only
Quotations from Mao

comics

2

your head is a bomb
blue dynamite in your hands
your hair a black flag

your pardon   to
me you mentioned dialectic
noticed how bodies flew
out of wrecked automobiles

is that a theory of social change
or simply the love of man
and a woman

3

on barricades
cobblestones tear themselves from streets
assaulting policemen
the last industrialists still at work

before the indifferent screen
diminishes even their bulging eyes
I turn back to my work
but observing the icepick in your hand
write rapidly these pages on revolution

The President Speaks to the Nation

this is a poem called I have a plan

I heard the President say
                                        his plan
plainly he said his plan

it was plain   because

he bent his mighty dark brows down
and quick as a helicopter flicking grass
out and away to fly to the wounded
licked upward his mighty lips

and said
            but

please excuse my saying anything
I ought not to say although
I want to tell you about plans

I have plans for
model cities miniature
poems like eggshell or china

that would ring true

he said the President said
he would not kill anyone
anymore and the way he would not kill

would be to let the killers kill
and then he would not be a killer

I think he said his plan
he had made out of models and secret
letters to old orientals
                                    who
each night he cut up with his scissors
to paste on his eyelids

so that when we sang
when we sang
to that dead poet
who once wrote a poem about
the freedom of leg-irons
the President
                and this was
and he planned this

could smile
              and
the President could say

ah my loving people
we will work in the rice fields
and we will rebuild our roads
and we will climb together out
into the light unshaken mountains
where together
and this is my plan my people
we will kill americans

            please excuse my saying
            this poem

            I no longer like poetry

but when my eyes close
small poems   like eggshells
drift in a white rice storm
past dead faces   dreaming eyes

Political Science

(after Brecht and Trudeau)

in the cartoon by Groz
lechery   greed
                    those
outlines: spiritual beings

and here   the same vomit
chips lager iconic tits

there's your new nation
one juridical
                and free

Room XV

If you walk into Room XV of the Prado in Madrid you will see there the most marvellous painting in the world. The painter, Velasquez, stands at his easel, a delightful blonde princess, accompanied by her maids in waiting, stands to his left and in front of him, to her left a dwarf lady and a dog, behind them other attendants, and at the back of the room, past a mirror that reflects two who are looking toward the painter, an official opens a door to allow more light to enter. Look closely and you will see that the spectators in the room XV are so life-like that at first you do not notice the layers of pigment making up their faces, the extraordinary application of paint to limb and cloth, the cunningly calculated placing and perspectives, the miraculous creation of even the atmosphere. So splendid is the illusion that you could easily believe these figures walk, talk amongst themselves, and go from room to room in the great museum to be admired by other paintings, as the Maids of Honour admire us.

Cabinet Secrets

1

privy to secrets I'm giving this one
away free: Canadian Daniel Ellsberg
with 47 volumes of our own genuine Pentagon Papers
(secretly I've yearned to be an anarchist
enemy of the state, traitor, political prisoner
Clifford Irving
                    at night I dream of
half-naked girls running through streets,
Stratford, Estevan, Yellow Grass, Corrinne)

I know the senior civil servant
who at 4:00 am in cold October
carried to the Governor General who
I think had not yet run his usual three
miles before breakfast the war measures
act to be signed
                    once he showed me
the cabinet room the table where
ministers sit where the prime minister
sits where the civil servant sits at
a secretary's table of eighteenth-century
but it is especially maple or walnut or
curved and I know where he must have written
war measures

2

so it has been always
archangels with great golden eyes
you cannot look at   those aloof hands
those golden tables
                              listen: I have heard
they do secret studies they have profiles
so finally I think angels come to a hole
in the ground inside a house inside a farm

with aloof hands
they make coffins
photographs

and take the guns of revelation

terror dug out of the ground
like wet mice
                        disappears
in the eternal silence

the cabinet

From "The Pentagon Papers"

Glossary:

AA
AAA
AID
ASA
ABM
AMB
ASAP

CAT
CHICOM
CHINAT
CHMAAG
CIAP
CINCPAC
COMUSMACV

DIA
DOD

EPTEL
(Deptel / Septel?)

FAL
FAR
FEC
FMWA
FY
FYI

ICA
ICC
I
IDA
ISA

KIA

LOC

MAAG
MAC
MAP
MDAP

PACON
POLAD

QTE

ROK RSM RSSZ RTA RVNAF RVNA SAC SAM SAR
SMMSNIESTCSVNTAORTERMTETTFTO&ETRIMUNO
USAFUSGUSIAUSIBUSISUSOMUWVCVMVNVNAFVOA
WTYT
UNQTE
ROLLING THUNDER

BARREL ROLL
BLUE SPRINGS FARMGATE FLAMING DART LEAPING LENA

The Trilemma:
a. Will-breaking strikes on the North (para 7) are
balked by (1) flash-point limits, (2) by doubts
that DRV will cave and (3) by doubts that VC will
obey caving DRV
b. Large U.S. troop deployments. (para 9) are blocked
by "French-defeat" and "Korea" syndromes, and Quat is
queasy. (Troops could be net negatives, and be beseiged).
c. Exit by negotiations (para 9) is tainted by the
humiliation likely to follow.

insurrection defection dissension impotence defeatism concession
accommodation

        deployment of Frogs and Sams in North Vietnam
        hot pursuit flak suppression strike strikes strikes
risks:
        losses panic revulsion sympathetic fires over
        Berlin, Cyprus, Kashmir, Jordan waters

                stretch-out retard the program
                circuit breaker

                        shunt

On the Renewal of Bombing in VietNam December, 1972

At the sight of this photograph
forming itself out of headlines and print
what should a poet do but cry out
that the dead are no less real
for falling into pictures of ruined cities

I do not mean to speak as a prophet
that cherished tone now detached
as if voice itself could be flung into space
without body
                    At my kitchen table
The Toronto Star lies beside tall salt cellars
and where Bess Truman stares
with her closed gaze
                                Nadezhda Mandelstam's
Hope Against Hope, I notice, wears its purple
cover like a funeral robe.

Tonight in our cities no doubt some
one will cry out
                      my daughter
sees in her dark room nameless horrors
and like photographs
                                silent and distant
the dead will fall
                      in the sum of
all days, nights, deaths, stars,
I hear this poem like a disembodied voice
less powerful than even a composition
made out of lead type and black ink

Ottawa October 70

winter the gatineau winter snow
Mike Snow's film and from the Skyline
roads curl like snow blind wind
drift
      and the river curls in its iron
turning
            iron flowers in a wind
            over the city
                              city winds
grey-blue iron white grey

film
      in the Cabinet glows
grey night   late fire

        law

Mike Snow's film in the National
Art Centre
                  back and forth
                  back and forth
                  back and forth
child
                  back and forth
                  back and forth
window
            back
                    teacher
                                back and forth
we
      there are
                    law
are in
winter again
child's time
                  the law
the iron   law
holds us as iron holds tongues
as iron holds ice as iron is

iron law we have come again to
iron-time
            the return
                        our words
visible as a snow a time of
                                    it is
again
       the prison of dream of
       prison

                              words words words the words

                              law
again
          winter
                              and snow closes over
                              ottawa   grey city
                              the city
                                        a book closing
                              a closed white book

Nerja

1

that ship
or
   is it
on the horizon

so: perception

you are close
to me you are

there
        it is
the horizon

holds there
three
        diminishing
ships

2

if you are there

say so

to me

        from hills

from ochre cities

from the ill-clad

speak

        words of

        the tower

its presence

            at least

3

this poem is built to
see through

see through

this poem

see

through

it

is

nothing

nothing

is this poem see

through

over and
over   I said
nothing
no one
believed
me

or the poem
not

there

see

The Garden of Delights

and so we went down to the river
to the corpses there but on our way
beside a willow copse we heard ringing
sounds as if a tree were hung
with bells and looked to see the willow
blossom into crystal as if its leaves
were birds
                so from the branches hung
lovers copulate their loves dropping
into a giant pool where storks and emus
swam with copulating lovers in their wings
while from their eggs emerged the limbs
of love and lovers clasping legs about
crystal goblets, bells and some stroked
flutes that blew sweet music from their
assholes while others sucked the tongues
of birds being fucked by mice or toads
or long-eared sages whose bald heads
served service to young balding girls
their legs entwined about the sage's eyes
and all went circling round the pool
of love
          now
                two such bodies will
not be seen again
                        love dear
in them life dear in them

so I looked at corpses, noticing
three female death still coy in them
and thought the whole world is a coffin
and a bed
              and watched the river wash
blood over a dark city near the top
(or bottom) left of Bosch's tryptich

Velasquez: Las Meninas

1

change the lines about
stone man and stone moon
to read   reflect on images

(fish locked in ice
like a memory of summer)

since form longs to be free
and not to know its name

just so
            Velasquez put him-
self into *Las Meninas* creat-
ing not only "a theology
of painting"
                        but self:

(if he is
            there who
painted the picture?

Gautier: "but where is the
picture?")
            neither anecdot-
al nor deceitful
                        measured

as if in that court your
life "saved" depended on

style: looking "as if"

so that Dona Margarita looks
out as deformed Maria Barbola
looks out
            at (being looked at
by The Maids in Waiting) Felipe?

Mariana? who look into a mirror
looking out at you looking at
them
        as if
                I hadn't saved the
poem from the moon stone

and the stone man

2

if he is looking at the
picture he could not have
painted it
                if he isn't
how could he have painted
it
  if he painted it
where was he
                        if he is
in it

3

"We observe the artist is
not painting on the canvas
which we as spectators are
viewing"
                Complete Guide
                to the Prado etc.

4

reflect: if he is
not painting *that*
painting

5

"calculating the real
existence of atmosphere"

Envoi

my country is not a country
                                                  but winter
rivers of ice
from St. Hubert terrible knives
run through the whiteness of my veins

politics pierce my heart
on a floor littered with history
I shiver while wardens shovel in
lunatic sentences, rag upon rag

it must be cold in prison, in québec

and your heart hurt singer
what do you see through its pane

icy slaves circle the river
montréal tense against the steel of its manacles
your words drifting like frozen wounds
                                                                    blessing
a sick bride
a murderous bridegroom
                                          that wedding
whose children will be colder killers
than the words of this or any other song

OUT OF PLACE

"Badland country," Israel thought. . . . It didn't look like badland country to him, yet the whole of the southern border from Roche Percée east of Hirsch to Shaunavon, over 200 miles west, was called badland country....

Land of Hope by Clara Hoffer and F. H. Kahan

"Artifacts Near Long Creek"

From official records it is learned that at various times in the past, bones of human beings have been uncovered in the same general area but all at higher prairie levels. These are not the products of prehistoric times. They are the remains of white men, trappers, wayfarers or even bad men fleeing from capture, whose bodies were interred just where they died.

Estevan The Power Centre by Andrew King

the nature of fiction
supposes our presence

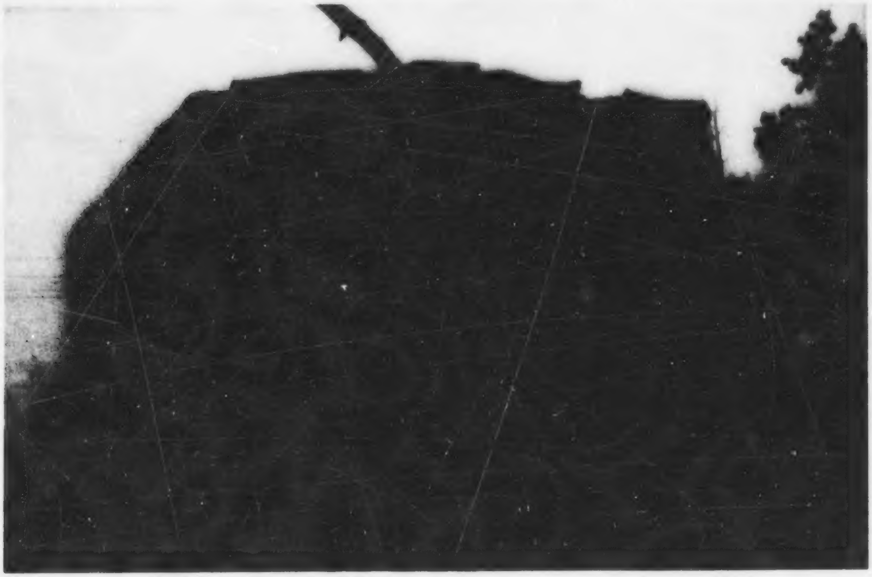
preface:

Knowing we could not take those papers from the vault, yet curious to know their contents, we moved into it and settled down for whatever stay seemed necessary. What pages we were not reading and sorting served for mattresses, sheets, and head rests. When we decided a page was insignificant for our purposes or saw it was blank we placed it in a pile to use for wiping ourselves or for after love. Others became serviettes, sunshades, etc.

Crackers, cheese, Fresca, we brought from the car and settled down to work. At first we could make no sense of things, and I spent long hours staring from the black interior to the blazing doorway. When my eyes burned past that white rectangle, I could see long beige and yellow prairie grasses, air so bright small star-motes swam in its atmosphere, like when you knuckle in your eyelids then open them fast. Beyond that a gravel road paling along the curve of a hill. I knew the grain elevator was to the right but refused to lean forward to see, leaving the framed picture intact. Bringing my sight back into the room required another period of blindness before the layered white paper emerged from the dark. Then colour, a greyness, reappeared, and the corners of the cement vault.

Our work proceeded over days. Some papers were clearly accounts, farm machinery bills, shipping invoices, feed allotments, egg sales' receipts, storage charges from the elevators. Others concerned religious matters, the finances of the congregation, salary of the rabbi, attempts to finance a visiting cantor. We assembled all these as chronologically as we could. There were also pages torn from old magazines, including covers from the earliest Life issues, a slim Queen Elizabeth (now Queen Mother) in ball gown, tiara, and marcelled hair, another of Toscanini playing piano with his granddaughter. Some pages did not seem to fit anywhere, seemed to be a diary or fiction of a kind, printed professionally yet appearing never to have been bound. Not numbered. And containing, we came to see, local place names, references to this colony, this farm, even to this vault. Using sentence structure from bottom and top lines, we put the sheets together in what we conceived was the right order, then began to read.

The dark slid over our shoulders as we read sitting cross-legged facing the bright doorway. A peculiar tale emerged, the pilgrimage west of a man and wife from the east to the place of his birth, home of his ancestors, a search for a lost home. Evidently the place they came to was this farm. The account of their journey often moved us, perhaps because we understood so clearly what ruined heritage they must have discovered, the abandoned house, rusting bedspring, stove weathering in tall dry grass, one spare tilting door jamb framing more prairie only, and this doorless vault open to wind, cold, heat, insects. The last pages were missing but we could see the end. We put down the story and turned back toward the vault.



I

THE RETURN

the return:

in the estevan poem, for example,
how everyone can be seen eating
or is it reading
                    but not everyone
there is myself in the souris valley
forty years later
                    Ann
looking at wild flowers
cactus   their thick colours

I remember how I dreamt
her
    pale as a flower
    in the white sun
and in the dream
she is taking pictures

she photographs me
walking away
along a curving path
the flowers coloured

                    and
my father appears
my mother appears
saying no words
troubled
            and all
the ghostly jews
of estevan
                praying
in the synagogue
    of the valley
in the covenant
    of coal mines
in these pictures
    of estevan

and omens   windows
facing inward
                    "an ideal
inserted into the plane
we call reality"   words
warning this is the place
you reach
               to name
remember and recite

the Hebrew alphabet
Invictus the first three
lines of Genesis
the unremembered man who stole
children from an empty town and
Latin   heroes in the hills and
glyphs uncles cousins step-
grandfather's sons and sisters

whatever has been hidden here
remains of speech
                              the town lives
in its syntax we are ghosts

look   on the road beyond
mesas and moonscape
hoodoos   signs cut in rock
graffiti   gods
an indescribable border

doors of perception:

roads lead here there
on the prairie Ann holds the Pinto
along great swoops of highway down
from Lloydminster past Batoche
rebellion Rudy's book researched
prophetic voices as a guide

in Huxley's version time curves
upon itself
            cities of the mescal dream
turned biblical   jeweled places
palaces of John in Revelation
Blake's engraving the drunkenness
of Smart's madness   prophecy

our history is in motion curved
like straight correction lines
earth-measured on a western grid
place known through time time
measuring place
                Thompson walked
through unafraid for knowing
measurement and lore
                        ignorant
of clock and vision we accelerate
a sweep through dying towns and farms

now is the badlands   measure
our choices random we believe
whatever we can find or where the map
of our own voices leads us listening to

the road to the cancer clinic
past the sundial's didacticism
toward the language of shadows
bedlam the alcoholic's nightmare
uses of wheat and rye and mould

strict farms die
beside the rails the roads
the sons construct
the rules of mind

the jewish exodus from shtetl to the plains
leads to this egypt abraham learned
dream-sickness and the way to heal
a place of bread and chemistry

madness is neither east nor north
Riel was hung in streets
I walked on every day to school

Note: Abraham Hoffer, son of Israel, is mentioned in a footnote to Huxley's *Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell.* A psychiatrist, Abraham Hoffer has done pioneer work in the uses of lysergic acid as a means of exploring the nature and causes of schizophrenia and alcoholism. His father was a wheat farmer.

birthmark:

seeing a mouse
my mother struck her temple

he'll be marked at birth
she said
                    the women cried

I carry the souris
on my brow
                        the river
in my head
                      the valley
of my dreams
still echoes
with her cry

souris river:

the mouse runs through passover and the harvest of matzoh
in its muddy layers of saying spread in the valley
joseph-dreams   thin years of wind storms
jews fleeing   fat years for egyptians

it is the blade of yom kippur unyielding
book of years
                it runs through the province of poetry
                it speaks in the barred hebrew syntax
                "wayfarers … fleeing from capture"

jewish river where my boyhood drowned
harvests of coal and desire
                "not the products of prehistoric times"

badlands:

1

black against sky
four horses   simple
particulars   amid
the endless treachery
that is remembering

there are no definitions

2

neither difficult nor easy
crossings
            happen
it appears

3

understand this
simplicity
this land is
treacherous

between Hirsch and
Hoffer
         it is
plain

4

neither difficult nor easy
crossings
                appear
it happens

5

four horses   amid
the endless treachery
that is remembering

desire

near Hirsch a Jewish cemetery:

ann is taking pictures again
while I stand in the uncut grass
counting the graves: there are forty
I think
            the Hebrew puzzles me
the wind moving the grass
over the still houses of the dead

from the road a muffled occasional
roar   cars passing   no one there
casts a glance at the stone trees
the unliving forest of Hebrew graves

in the picture I stand arms outstretched
as if waiting for someone
                                    I am
in front of the gates you can see
the wind here   the grass
always bending the stone unmoved

rabbi berner's farm:

record our searching for the place
the years of childhood blown across
has scattered like the jews of Hirsch
wherever secondary highways lead
through renewed green fields roads
passing cattle sheds
                    his first wife
one son   friends   inhabit   land lying
here or close to other townships
of the dead   he is alone
an island now
under warm rains and cedar

not even ruins here

slaughterhouse:

after the morning in the slaughterhouse
grandfather leading me back to the kitchen
the farm unpainted weathered grandmother
milking guts of shit for skins and kishke
it's not a place for boys she says
her face redder than strawberries
her hands like cream

lost place:

in the book of years
berner told me could be found
your own name exactly spelled
his own his sons the russian
names of villages and jews

twelve strangled ducklings
laughter in bed

you were written

I read the land for records now

wild strawberries   cocoa-butter
taste of Hirsch
                                bags of curdling
warm spent streams

tested on a hair of berner's beard
the ritual slaughter knife

even the blood has disappeared

STRIKE sept 1931:

the coal miners stand in groups their faces like
Al Jolson's in Sonny Boy/they raise fists toward the
Chief of Police/he is wearing a blue uniform with
brass buttons on the jacket the red town hall at
his back and behind it the black water tower/the
siren at the top of the tower is blowing although it
isn't noon

the coal miners stand in groups their faces like
Al Jolson's in Sonny Boy/a woman in a long dress
raises both arms/she is shouting beside a touring
sedan/the Mounted Police come round the corner
on foot/they are dressed in brown jackets with Sam
Browne belts and brown trousers with a long yellow
stripe down the leg/they carry their pistols at
eye level

the coal miners run this way and that/one is falling
there is smoke around the guns of the Mounted Police/
windows are breaking/stones fly through the windows/
a coal miner with a face like Al Jolson's in Sonny
Boy is shouting

Musical Estevan

> "Many a long winter night was made pleasurable when neighbours would gather in some home and heartily join in the singing of old favourite songs, even without a solitary instrument to maintain a good intonation."
>
> *Estevan The Power Centre*

BIENFAIT

STOP

bienfait july 1/74:

there is no content: except
a fat man in blue overalls
sitting beside a 7-up cooler
in the fourth store across a line
light moving back and forth defines

avoid heroism and gods
nearby in stone
past moonscape and river
they are not yours

no one has the right to memories
in the sun I see my father falling
guns blossom my red-bearded Hebrew
teacher slashes my knuckles for a thought
I think of English poetry the text
mysterious his children carrying
miners and policemen to the library
as the spine carries the silver cord
precious fluid for the golden bowl

aesthetics answers to our need
for structures in our sweat   tender
the copies of Tarzan/lovely
the book of mars
                                turn southward
there the badlands lie

estevan, 1934:

remembering the family we
called breeds   the Roques
their house smelling of urine
my mother's prayers before
the dried fish she cursed
them for their dirtiness their
women I remember too
                                        how
seldom they spoke and
they touched one another

even when the sun killed
cattle and rabbis
                              even
in poisoned slow air
like hunters
                    like lizards
they touched   stone
they touched
                    earth

lines for an imaginary cenotaph:

george hollingdale
bruce carey
george chapman
jacob barney mandel

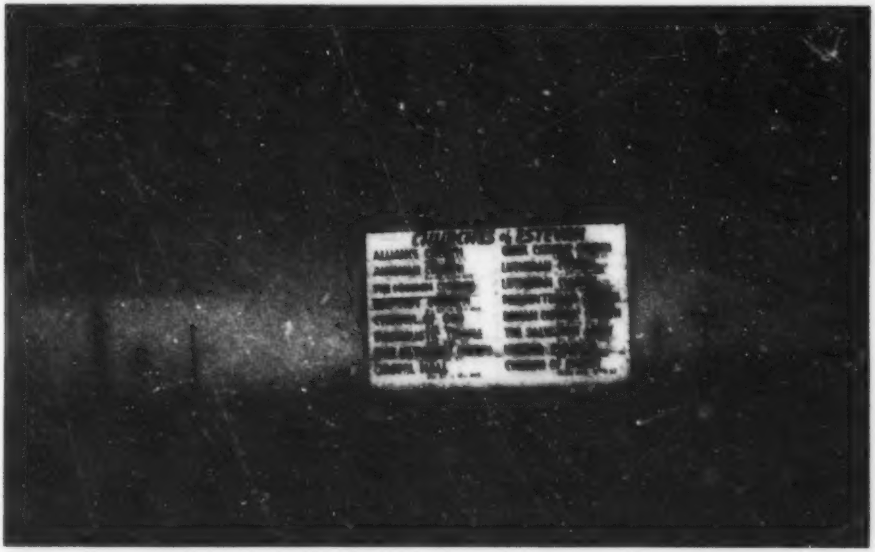
William Tell Mandel: sd
Capt A.W. (ab) Hardy

Isaac Berner
                    Annie's
son

all the kinds of war
we say our kaddish for

chief Dan Kennedy
singing
beneath the petroglyphs
hoodoos we sd
at Roche Percée

Assiniboine songs



returning from war:

(for jbm 1918-1944)

floors gleaming in the white frame house
yellow as wax the night before he died
she said her eyes yellow as a hawk's
she saw him dressed in white   clean
she said this in the room   the blinds
drawn   heat leaning on the house
over the room's dusk the floor's gleam
white   he was so clean

in the estevan summer
hazardous as desert hear
gopher squeaks momentary hawks
lean in the pushing and shoving
wind   the sun breathing
heat
      and the impossibility of death

Recognition Names:

Mrs. C. Boakes, T. A. Perry, W. A. Ellis, H. Nicholson, W. W. Lynd QC, Miss Nora Mather, D. A. Bannatyne, Greg Trout, Mrs. Carl Anderson, Mrs. David Bannatyne Sr., C. D. Griffith, George Lawrence, Carl Skoberg, A. C. Bannatyne, M. L. Clenndennan, A. W. Forgay, W. J. Rupert, Stan Mays, Ken Johns.

Estevan The Power Centre

petroglyphs at st victor:

1

watching the sun
watching the sun's wheel
great slow metaphors
wheel toward me out of the sun

they take my eyes from my head
they place my eyes on rocks
they take my crying tongue
they wheel back toward the sun
their black hands carrying my name

now my drawings of god
look no better than my child's
drawing of me
I remember
the sun his arms flailing
wheat and skin his mouth
warning of hollows and gulleys
one eye grinning news
about crossings
I try feet now
get the toes wrong
forget the signals once again

whether the snake's head
points inside or outside the sun
for circling the snake ridge

I've always been wrong
about metaphors
about the five figures
of discourse

the seventy
names of rhetoric and tree
alphabets
when they gave me
my name I knew the only one
to follow me would mistake
my image/sign
all the others
praising the gods

2

the crooked gods:

do they mean anything?
I ask Ann
parkland
rolling below sandstone

silent
she turns
the camera
here
there
I kneel
before the crooked gods

last light wheeling
over the land
their handprints
their great feet
their stone faces
move
turning
we leave
take with us
photographs
silent
as
their open mouths

3

below the petroglyphs
separate as Quebec
St Victor maintains
direction
          in badlands
four horses on a hill
become a black turmoil
scattered gravel on a road
somersaulting birds
another god
hangs on his cross
near Gravelbourg

we drive through names:
Coronach Canopus Constance
Big Beaver Hart Ceylon Glasnevin
Ogema Horizon Assiniboia
La Fleche McCord Mankota
Stonehenge Montagu
Readlyn Willow Bunch
Dahindel Wheatstone Crystal Hill
Galilee Truax Amulet
Pangman Khedive
                    until

Point Alison
where the super-continental stands
our children crying out
barely glimpse redness a form
the end of names and aesthetics

later
amid wreckage of slippers
licorice I remember the cut
god's mouths at Wood Mountain
rhetoric of stone its bluntness

Ann
talking
about children
tomorrow
our return
home
train time

647 Maple Dr.
Weyburn, Sask.,
April 7, 1975

Prof. Eli Mandel,
English Dept.
York University,
Toronto, Ont.

Dear Professor Mandel,

Heard you on 'This Country in the Morning' and was more than surprised when you mentioned that your new book on Poetry and Prose will be about the ghost Jewish Colony of Hoffer (or Sonnenfeld Colony which is the correct name).

Whereas my husband and I were both born in the colony and are still carrying on farming operations there and have a great interest in that area we were wondering where you got your information.

It was interesting to hear you say that your wife has been out taking pictures. Would it be possible to know of this, and when and where do you plan to have your book published. We would like to buy it when it becomes available.

Thank you.

Yours truly.
Mrs. N. Feldman

sonnenfeld:
Mrs. Feldman writes to tell me
I've got the ghosts wrong

it isn't Hoffer, she says,

I look again
at our photographs
fading pastels
grainy texture

as if it happened
long ago
Mrs. Feldman
I say to myself softly
I can't see you in the picture
there is no one there

were we in the wrong place?
who is mistaken?
what can the letter possibly mean
its words in pale blue ink
copied carefully as a will
or a schoolteacher's correction
of a bad essay
on the geography of the west?

the hoffer colony:

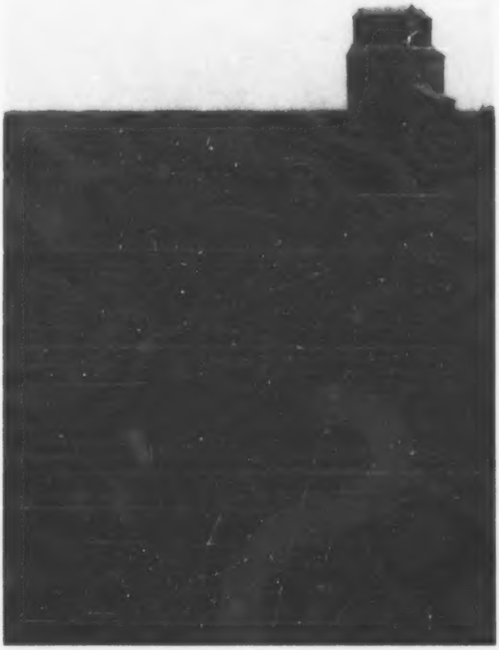
just as in McCourt's *Saskatchewan*
though unlike his prose
clapboard buildings on a ridge
pastel fields tree stumps
an overturned quebec heater
iron bedstead rusting
useless springs
                    the clichés
appalling   over-written
like a bad travel book

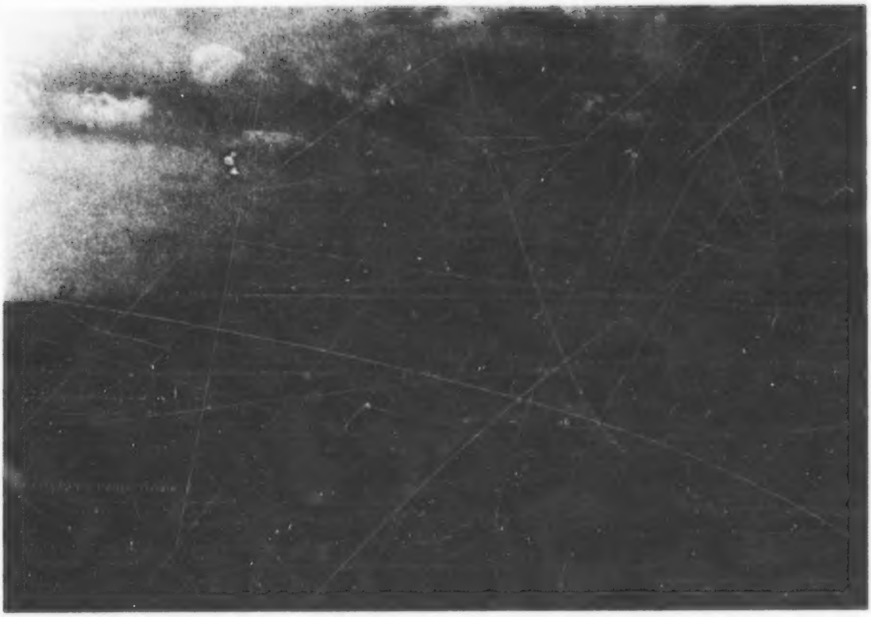
and in a concrete vault its floor
littered with prairie I find
scripture a farmer's exodus Israel
Hoffer's accounting I begin
to feel gloomy about possibilities
in mythology some books of the bible
devote themselves to family lines
some to a census
                    there are stories
about passionate heroic tax
collectors   others where merchants
ruined by investment sell children

I look uneasily at grain inventories
machinery bills, newspapers
think about my uncle standing
among rocks with Israel
both Jews proud and successful

before we take our easy leave
how should we understand
prophecies and miracles?

POOL





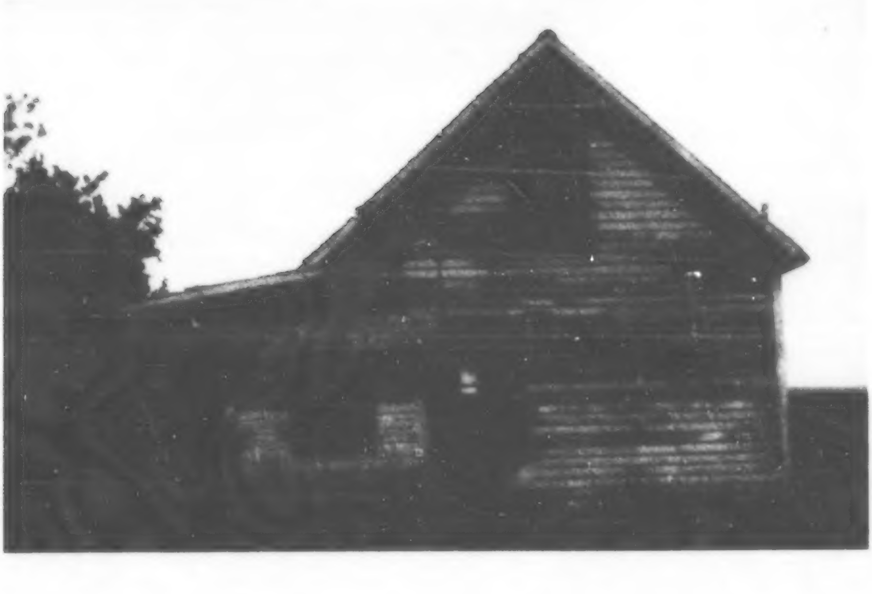
sponsors names:

W. W. Lynd, H. Nicholson, Mrs. Ida Peterson,
Phillips Family, Paul Grundeen, Ronald Galloway,
Mrs. D. L. Irvine, Mrs. W. Henneberg, David A. Bannatyne,
Donald Perry, George Greene, Frank Mather, Everet
Murphy, Clifford Holmgren

Estevan The Power Centre

Last of the Buffalo *The Soo Line*

Mandel Henry prop.
M Mandel and Co h 938 Second St.



II

THE DOUBLE

the doppelganger:

ways to prevent me:

refusing to be interrupted especially by children
single-mindedness to the point of brutality
in all matters of politics religion metaphysics &
the character and lives of your closest friends
praising the worst lines of your fellow writers
jogging followed by volley ball and cold showers
concentrated masturbation before and after sex
sleeping with a towel knotted in your back
inspired teaching ferocious tactics in rumoli
combinations of alcohol librium and bad novels

seeing I'm here you know all methods fail
you don't even know how long it has been
what I might have said to children or others
now it's forever too late
no one could possibly know
you've been gone for days
when I make love to your wife
she will moan and praise you
asking you never to leave

where shall I say you have gone?

Fd

the doppelganger (2):

think about changes
the calendar of your bones
page after page of skin
lifted from your days
and darkness drifting on the earth
across the rim of turn
your metamorphosis from sperm
the sperm's anxieties
the foetal journey
through waves of mother
urging in her self a self
through coursing blood
in which you swam
whatever fish you were
this is no longer you:
I take possession of your eyes
to see the mother in your blood

new politics of blood are born
the journey in your bones begins
again: here is the day you could not know

doubles: estevan

1

the Orpheum shows a desert film
in Ann's picture the Orpheum is pale
against a paler sunlight a washed-out
film: someone who could be me stands
beside a sweet shop that the Mathers ran
for boys whose faces had been ruined

on such illusions we have built our lives
palaces of art where Sara dreams
her precious dream of being
                                        all that
every image makes impossible and true

licorice whips and jawbreakers
that sweetness of the tongue mocks
broken faces of the ones returned
like images of films we fled
the hunchback lobster monster
broken patched
                        I stand
inside the film and stare
at places that I never knew

2

pictures
in the baptist tent
of jesus who stared
at you

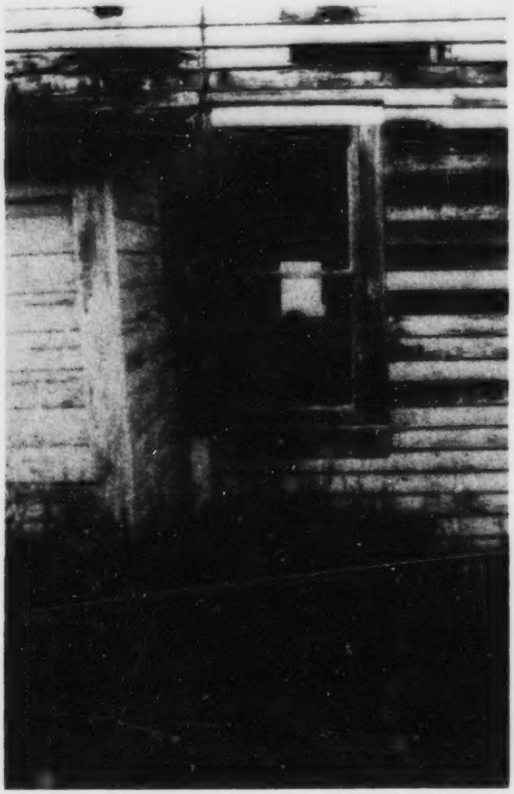
in the chatauqua
of mary who smiled
at you

in The Estevan Mercury
window of ladies who
became a skull
and smiled
at you

unholy places
the churches of estevan

3

in the photograph of the Orpheum
the marquee lettering says Devils Island Air Conditioned
Comfort slant sunlight marking off plaster abstracts beside
Mather's Candy Store and you can see me standing near the
store where looking for jawbreakers and licorice whips
before the Saturday afternoon show I watched for three
deformities and later heard the ventriloquist's spitting
dummy speak thinking of buggery somewhere in that store
though it may have been inside a school not
even mentioned in the book of Estevan and it was long
ago anyway.



the cause of doubles:

on the way to the faculty club
you pass a zone through which neutrons flow
through you through trees through wives
through walls of brick or
hangings in the club
                                        on one side you
are you/on the other you yourself but new
a kind of Paul upon the road to the
Alberta faculty club
                                    this new one
lectures in your voice but transforms
                                                        you
before you cross the zone/think:
it might be chemicals or breakfast food
a hair spray used unthinkingly
before you crossed the zone

but now like David Bowie in the film
he's falling in/the other you takes off
his eyes it isn't cancer after all
it isn't what you thought it was
beside yourself you think
of gifts
            Houdini in his chains
his silk-lined coffin the undead
Doc Savage poet madly writing praise
to god in bedlam transforming seas
to bring him coral bones and pearls
the other you speaks of
                                        you
cross the zone
                    later
warn your puzzled friends
of breakfast food and sprays

questions a double asks:
whether anything in your dreams accounts for his
appearing now
how it is the explanation of acute anxiety does not
suffice to dispel him
what in your philosophical readings could be consistent
with the notion of reduplication
whether he is a refutation of clock time and a way
to justify eternity
why you are afraid of him as shown by your blood
pressure and pulse

does his appearance improve your sexual performance
has the government of Canada Ontario Alberta significantly
improved because of his presence
what explanations you offer to your father/to your department
chairman/to the department of revenue
give a detailed account of all sado-masochistic
fantasies you entertain
refer to each scatalogical childhood incident
coprophilia necrophilia sodomy

do you know yourself

have you any reason for hope or delight

why do you think I am here

will you change your life

account for the difference between the spider and
the spider plant

have you considered the fern the coleus the philodendron
the patience plant the flowers the hoya the lilies
of the day the ants bees sweetness light the sun the
moon

why are you writing out these questions

will you do nothing to help me

is poetry all you have to offer

the double world:

it is variously believed that this world is the
double of another, as in Plato, Swedenborg, Malebranche,
some of Immanuel Kant, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov,
Stanley Kubrick
Two clocks set at the same time in
identical universes should stop at the same time.
This clock is a shadow of that real clock. When I
look at my clock I have no way of knowing whether I am in
the first or second universe. It is spring there too:
and the other Ann has grown an avocado exactly the same
height, greenness, number of leaves as the one Ann grew
here or there. My grandfather Berner weighed the same
in both universes, sang sweet Jewish psalms, ate sour
curds. In the two graveyards Annie Berner is dead.
Nothing on either prairie changes though the winds blow
across immensities your heart would shrivel to imagine
knowing they pass between the worlds and can be heard to do
so on the road to Wood Mountain. That is what was written
in the rocks.

instructions:
(on the nature of doubles and doubling)

all mirrors should be covered
do not look deeply into a sink of hot water
ditto cold
wear rings on only two fingers
your eyes are doubles doubled
everything divides by two or is uneven
poetry consists in the doubling of words
doubled words are poetic words
this is the true meaning of duplicity
each poem speaks to another poem
the language of poetry is a secret language
these are the true doubles

false doubles are ones and threes
four is a good number

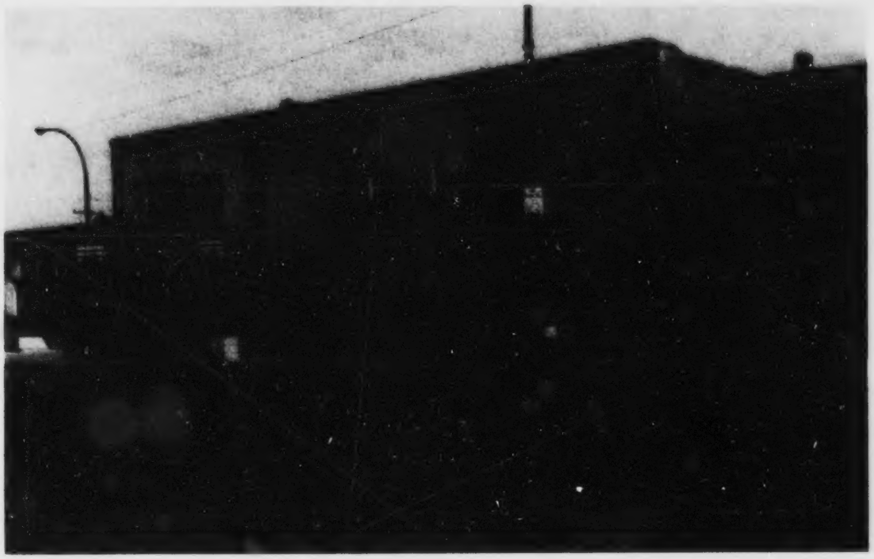
doubled names are: eli elijah
jesse jesus
paul saul
joseph pharoah
etc.

in Hebrew this is common
no one knows the jewish name of god

indian names are secret
poetry is the naming of secret names
among these are:
god
spirit
alphabets

names in stone
doubled names
the psalms
hoodoos
animals
eyes
jewels

the place of no shadows called badlands
the place of shadows called badlands
you begin to see the difficulties



various kinds of doubles:

Mirrors Rivers Water Wells
Jewels Babies Twins
Actors Brothers Sisters
Fathers Mothers Sons
Daughters Lovers Others
Princes Swans Frogs
Maidens Cousins Others

Plastic Neon Glass
Gold Silver Rings
Diamond Earrings
Ringing Dancing Drowning
Eating Dolls Rabbits
Thin Men Fat Men   Tattoos
Giants Heroes Roots
Gardens Mandrake Mermaids
Helen Paul Saul
Clever Odysseus
David and Jonathan
Crickets Locusts Gophers
Kings Queens Jacks
Shadows and Rainbows
Stars Suns Moons
Sundogs Barking
White Hopes Black Men
Beulah Couples
Writing
Pictures
Huck Finn
Tom Sawyer
Mark Twain

Others

various kinds of doubles:

Mirrors Rivers Water Wells
Jewels Babies Twins
Actors Brothers Sisters
Fathers Mothers Sons
Daughters Lovers Others
Princes Swans Frogs
Maidens Cousins Others

Plastic Neon Glass
Gold Silver Rings
Diamond Earrings
Ringing Dancing Drowning
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Stars Suns Moons
Sundogs Barking
White Hopes Black Men
Beulah Couples
Writing
Pictures
Huck Finn
Tom Sawyer
Mark Twain

Others

III

A SUITE FOR ANN

Fear of Flying

I dream of flying but I fear
I either will or will not fly
or flying will not land or will
or landing will at once arise

waking
          I place my feet on
creaky floors
                              you beside me
dream of stairs   climbing
vines
          and wings

Strange Places

the places that we go are strange
but stranger that we go to place
our strangeness where we neither
know we were nor where but only
that the place we know is neither

but the way that tells us
we have been
                    not only here
but where there was the telling

it was so
            we did not choose it
it was
         so

Place

a line
colour

history
places
          never
choose
never
          it is
we know
love
      not
chosen

here

The Wayfarer

Darkness flows over the green
the horn fills with night

languid
where children are laughing

though she sings of night
she remembers
                    journeys

look how thick the forest
where she has been
or where
            night
spills over

IV

EPILOGUE

on the political problem of writing a regional poem jewish rural historical nostalgic:

for rick salutin

stupidity is the devil. Look in the eye of a chicken and you'll know. It's the most horrifying, cannabalistic and nightmarish creature in this world.
—Werner Herzog

On Fridays in Regina the difficulties become acute, how to
smuggle two live chickens in a burlap sack down the street
of Ukrainian neighbours, past two alien churches, one Russian
Orthodox, its onion domes looming over me (alien afraid as
Klein would say) like a Chagall version of shtetl-life, the
other Greek, its angular priestly spire aloofly critical
of the gross yiddishkeit of chickens. Their obstinacy, their
cunning. How do they manage to wiggle their obscene squawking
heads through burlap? Why should my fate be set by fowl?
The murderous notions in my head on Friday, Sabbath eve:
"chicken you'll die before the ritual blessing, that's for sure,"
detestable the squalid hut to which I move, its bloody
rows of funnels, feathers stuck to crusted blood of slaughtered
birds.

I think of god, his commandments regulating the sanctity
of chicken soup, appeal the case to high authority. "It isn't
fair" I say. "To whom" my grandfather's omnipotent
reply, "you or the chickens?"

My radical jewish friend, the dramatist, having celebrated
the revolutionary spirit of Anglo-Canadian farmers, explains,
his pale blue eyes ablaze with lust or hate or warming to
his task:
BOURGEOISE PREJUDICE ISRAELI EXPANSIONISM JEWISH
PLOTS VULGARITY EXPLOITATION SORDID JEWISH
WRITING SELLING JEWISHNESS LANDLORDS JEWISH
LANDLORDS FUNDS TO ZIONISM

America, my enemy. America, what have you done to us? To
our alliance with the true proletariat? The vision possesses
me of the workers of Kitimat marching to free the boys of Regina
from the tyranny of chicken soup. I must rid myself of
deviationism. The possibility of humiliating chickens and
schochets, the excitement of the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards
descending on regional theatres, slaughtering playwrights.

Meanwhile the chickens continue to squawk, past Eleventh Avenue,
down the mean streets, St John, Halifax, Montreal, Toronto,
Ottawa, to where the gleaming razor waits. I hear the ritual
muttered prayer, a whisper faster than the slit of knife
over plucked throats, blood draining into funnels. Later,
the salted, watered birds steaming in their soup adorn
our place, the unpolitical whiteness of the table-cloth,
familial statements of poor silver-plate and hand-worked
candle-sticks, historial re-enactments of a pledge, the
wedding of the sabbath day, dressed, proud, adorned, we
celebrate.

Across the nation jewish dramatists recite the commune's
words. I see my mother and my father clubbed to death.
Cheated, I wish these ghost poems dead or burned
but put them in this book.

The commissars have won again.

Jewish Colonization Association

jn/fg

46, Queen Anne's Gate,
London, SW1H 9AP.
13th July 1976.

Hon. Alvin Hamilton, P.C., M.P.
House of Commons,
Ottawa.

Dear Mr. Hamilton,

Jewish cemetery near Hirsch, Saskatchewan

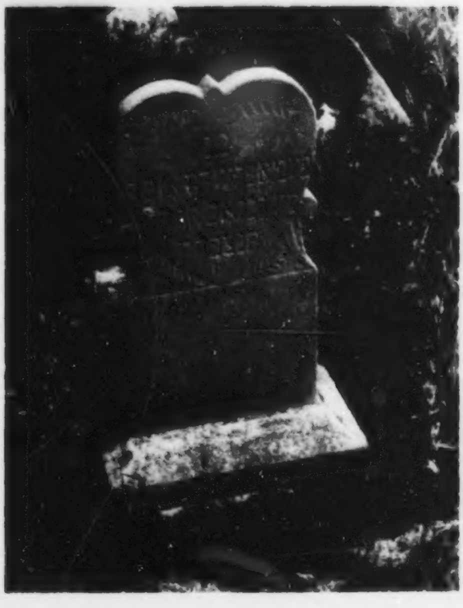
I thank you for your letter of 28th June containing a very interesting suggestion concerning the marking and maintenance in perpetuity of the old Jewish cemetery which served the original settlement which we called Hirsch Colony.

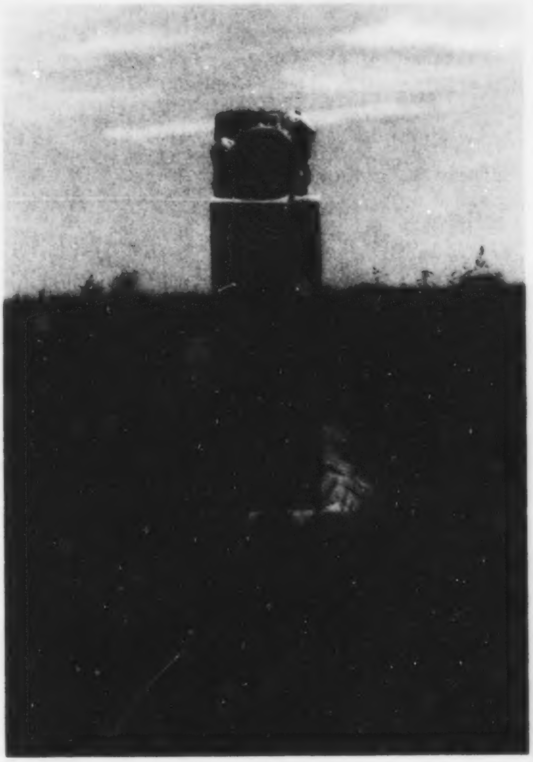
The problem is well known to us and we have been considering how it might best be solved, since we have had other suggestions besides yours. We intend to adopt a solution as satisfactory as possible to all the interested parties.

I will not fail to keep you informed.

Yours sincerely,

Director.





PICTURES IN AN INSTITUTION

1

Notice: all mirrors will be covered
the mailman is forbidden to speak
professors are confined to their offices
faculties no longer exist.

2

I speak of what I know,
how uncle Asher, spittle on his lips,
first typed with harvest hands the fox
across a fence and showing all good men
come to their country's aid rushed off to Israel
there to brutalize his wife and son

how step-grandfather Barak wiped
sour curds out of his curly beard
before he roared that Sabbath in my ears
what Sara, long his widow, dreamed
the night she cried: God, let him die at last,
thinking perhaps of Josef who had lost
jewels in Russia where the Cossack rode
but coughed his stomach out in Winnipeg

Your boredom does not matter. I take,
brutal to my thoughts, these lives, defy
your taste in metaphor; the wind-break
on the farm that Barak plowed to dust
makes images would ruin public poetry.

The rites of love I knew:
how father cheated brother, uncle, son,
and bankrupt-grocer, that we might eat
wrote doggerel verse, later took his wife,
my mother, in the English way beside my bed.
Why would he put his Jewishness aside?
Because there was no bread?
Or out of spite

that doctors sliced his double rupture,
fingered spleen, and healed his bowel's ache?

Lovers lie down in glades, are glad.
These, now in graves, their headstones sunk,
knew nothing of such marvels, only God, his ways,
owning no texts of Greek or anthropology.

3

Notice: the library is closed to all who read
any student carrying a gun
registers first, exempt from fines,
is given thirteen books per month,
one course in science, one in math,
two options
campus police
will see to co-ed's underwear

4

These names I rehearse:
Eva, Isaac,
Charley, Yetta, Max
now dead
or dying or beyond my lies

till I reeling with messages
and sick to hold again their bitter lives
put them, with shame, into my poetry.

5

Notice: there will be no further communication
lectures are cancelled
all students are expelled
the reading of poetry is declared a public crime

MARY MIDNIGHT

Revised with Preface. Initial appearance in *Alphabet Magazine*. "Mary Midnight's Prologue" appeared in *Black and Secret Man*.

PREFACE

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary gives as a primary meaning of *oratory*: "a place of prayer, small chapel, room or building for private worship" as in Hooker's "In Temples hallowed for public use and not in private oratories." The secondary meaning given is one more likely to be found in familiar use today: "The art of the orator or public speaking; the delivery of orations or speeches; rhetorical or eloquent language." In the eighteenth century on Grub Street, the two meanings collided in a peculiar way and for what seems very odd intentions indeed. They were apparently deliberately confused, with blasphemous and probably salacious reason, particularly by one Mrs. Midnight, author and otherwise editor of the *Midwife*, better known as the religious poet Christopher Smart, thought to be a madman, incarcerated in Bedlam in later years as a raving drunk. He was praised and defended by Dr. Samuel Johnson, who knew something of the darker side of eighteenth-century writing. In the 1750s, Smart seems to have tried to make a living by means of a kind of literary street-theatre he entitled "The Old Woman's Oratory," offering in pubs orations, songs, performances of various kinds including music by a mysterious "Great Creature," dog shows, monkey tricks, and the appearance of "Henley in Petticoats."

Mary Midnight, first written in 1963, came into being as a farcical re-invention of "The Old Woman's Oratory," the work of Mrs. Midnight, parodist and transvestite. The figures of Blake and Fuseli as they appear in *Mary Midnight* are pure invention, though the echoes of *Macbeth*, Milton, and Shakespeare intentionally recall the parodies of verse in the *Midwife* and elsewhere in Smart.

This early poem, now revised, re-appears following its initial printing in James Reaney's *Alphabet*, and recalls my own interests in *Black and Secret Man*, written at the same time, but more especially points to the concerns of a new MS., *Blood Lines*, if not in form and language then at least in obsessive images.

Smart, of course, is remembered for much more than parody and grossness. Perhaps for "Sweet Jesus Lunatic," perhaps for his own and his best summation of a tragic life: "But in my life I quested for beauty, but God, God has sent me to the sea for pearls." Lines from his glowing experimental poem, *Jubilate Agno*.

ELI MANDEL

ADVERTISEMENT

Tomorrow the 3rd inst. will be exhibited in the Great Room at the Castle Tavern in Pater-Noster-Row, A GRAND CONCERT of VOCAL and INSTRUMENTAL MUSICK, BY several EMINENT HANDS. At the same time will be Opened, and given gratis, THE OLD WOMAN'S ORATORY: OR, HENLEY IN PETTICOATS. To be conducted by Mrs. MIDNIGHT. Author of the MIDWIFE, and her FAMILY. N.B. There will be FOUR ORATIONS, After the First of which, Signior ANTONIO AMBROSIANO from Naples will perform A CONCERTO on the CEREMONA STACCATO, Vulgarly called the SALT-BOX. After the Second, will be presented, A GREAT CREATURE. On a very Uncommon Instrument. After the Third, A Solo on the Viol d'Amore, and another Piece by the Great Creature. The Candles will be snuffed to soft Musick by Signior Claudio Molepitano, For his Diversion, being the First Time of any Gentleman's appearing in the Character. And the whole will conclude with an Oration by OLD TIME in favour of *Matrimony*, a solo on the Violin-cello by CUPID *in propria persona*; and a Song to the Tune of *Roast Beef of Old England*; to which all the good Company are desired to join in Chorus.

London Daily Advertiser, December 2, 1751

Scene

An ice arena. In the central foreground on the ice lies an injured player in a bright striped uniform of reds and blues. Behind him rise banked rows of seats, now unoccupied, though it is from here the crowd gathers to watch the part of the action which takes place on a small box stage at the right centre of the foreground. This stage is angled so as to be visible both to the crowd in the arena and to the audience. At the top of the arena the seats become the ramparts of a gothic castle and the left foreground of the arena is therefore the moat of the castle.

Characters

MARY MIDNIGHT

Obviously dark, but rakish and bosomy, appears pregnant, though this may simply be an effect of her skirts and Augustan folds.

SHAPE

Nondescript twentieth-century male, some suggestion of the sinister, some of the comic.

FUSELI

Small; sharp-featured; pointed nose; wears a padded robe (house-coat) which is too long in the sleeves, and also drags on the floor.

BLAKE

Plump; round nose; round eyes; round spectacles; wears shirt sleeves and leather apron.

CHRISTOPHER SMART

Small, plump, round man, but appears once in woman's dress, very like Mary Midnight's, once in bright striped player's uniform, once in Macbeth's kingly robes which are too large for him.

AUTHOR

Eli Mandel as Eli Mandel.

CROWD

In blues and reds, cod-pieces, leather smocks, pointed hats, some in contemporary clothing.

Prologue

MARY MIDNIGHT:

I don't doubt that I prefer London, 1763,
Though why I was born there baffles me.
I seem to remember hop-fields in Kent
Before the darkness fell on me in Lent.

But someone called me in my cave
And now emerged in light, my love,
I come to embrace you in my pantaloons
And my almanac wisdom in my belly's balloon.

Inside me you will find all wisdom,
The magazine before catalogue and doom
Where I unpage the universal heart
Of continental tears and provinces of hurt.

Do not be afraid of my vulvular mouth.
Such darkness was before the dust.
Such darkness will be after wrath.
In such darkness will be after birth.

I have swallowed other poets in other times.
My uterus is seminal with rhymes.
You think your present is your singing past.
I know the darkness is the future lost.

Now I shall become your landscape
Now the towns of your eye will collapse.
Now you will join your body's slough
To the water of mother of all the dead.

SHAPE:

Arrange the scene within the socket of your eye
As though in caves of light a blazing ice
Arena shapes itself on which at random,
Carelessly diffused, with languished head
Unpropped, a player lies in slavish pads,
No murmurous crowd to tell his beaten limbs
Or moan his twisted ridicule of hurt.

Display before your unbelieving mind
A single net and other oddities that here
Will disentangle rules.

You can begin with this sort of verse, according to the best examples, making the mind its own stage, no matter what you're at: I mean your business or your sense of parents, politics, polemics, prosthetics, promiscuity, propriety, or protomorphic games. In fact, she's an uncalled-for intruder, something that just happens, even in the most polite families. You know her though you may not want to know her, and I can't help what goes on here, I mean mixing hockey and poetry, or the dark woman who has just spoken to you about the injured man you left upon the ice. Mary is always obscure, and tonight she's darker than ever. I don't know what we'll make of her directions to a muddy, reedy, sloughy land, unless she means a moat beside a gothic castle where we find a painter at his rampart painting castles and a poet making copper words that run along the vaults and buttresses, the coigns and vantages and wedges.

The Only Act

FUSELI:

The air nimbly and sweetly recommends
Itself unto our senses. Heaven's breath
Has wed itself to the groom of weather
And the bride of light whitens the day.
I do not fear this delicate breed.

BLAKE:

The sun will rise out of the womb
The dust will sift unto the sun
All things burn forever in the dark
I was made of copper and was never born.

FUSELI:

Yet lamentations ride upon the air
Like hags whose sabbath I must paint.
If you can look into the seeds of fear
Say which will grow and name the plant.

BLAKE:

I know this country. These vegetable hills.
This coal. I was born in this valley.
I was first spoken in this valley.

FUSELI:

Are such things here as we do speak about?
Imperfect speakers, born and not born
In seeds of new themes, new instruments,
What consequences will our birth betray?

BLAKE:

No mystery.
Consider your castle of tears.
You are not here, though you speak here
And in your speaking will unravel sleep.

SHAPE:

[looking up from a book he is reading]

Dickens. A novelist of note especially good in crowd scenes. Rather like Breughel. The crowd is waiting for the appearance of a poet named Christopher Smart who, dressed as a woman (titillating, but not unheard of), performs on a salt box.

CROWD:

She will be on soon
She will sing her lewd songs
Sometimes she comes as a ship
With all its rigging loose
And her masts bare

She rides upon a bare mast.
Watch her among the ropes
Among the hanging curtains
We have heard her songs
On the bare stage she sings.

[Smart enters]

CROWD:

Undress! Undress!

[Smart waves his salt box before the crowd. The shouts subside one by one until a last cry of unutterable obscenity hangs alone.]

SMART:

Ghosts and singers of the year
Listen to a song of love
I have lived in caves to learn
What the singer knows of fear

When your king his threat unveiled
Like a Serpent in his hand
I extolled the God of years
And the serpent too I hailed

Now I dance the dance of death
Now I have become your whore
Drink my language while you breathe
Soon you will be cast ashore

On the shore your breath will burn
And you will endure the flame
And your flame will turn to tears
When you praise the God of years.

SHAPE:

[shouting above the enormous wave of applause, while the Breughel-like, sharp-nosed people nudge one another, leering and jeering, a huge, pot-bellied man, the shape of a wood-burning stove, jiggles his cod-piece]

You see what this leads to? Anything can happen in this arena.

[There is immediate silence as a great gaping fish slides onto the stage. SHAPE lowers his voice.]

I think Mary Midnight has returned.

MARY MIDNIGHT:

[stepping out of the mouth of the fish]

Now my first awards of the night:
This child of the mouth of the fish
I present to the player

[gives SMART a baby]

This man-woman with his child
will win the golden tooth

[reaches into the mouth of the fish and to the sound of a horrid aspirant from the crowd removes a golden tooth]

when he suckles the child.

SHAPE:

When he suckles the child.
What else will we see?

MARY MIDNIGHT:

Until then I say the dust shall fall
Upon you and you shall eat coal
And taste only the shards of coal
Torn from the hillsides and valleys

No one will know the meaning of my words
I will be comic in your beds
I will be the bone of your contention
I will be the dry breast of your mother
I will be your father's adultery
I will be the tooth you bare in your midst
I will be the name of your cities
And your children will adore me.

SHAPE:

Darker and darker. The woman
Is impossible.
[He begins to push the fish off the stage and amid grunts and groans speaks on.]
It seems—
We're back—to—the—ice
Again—When I—finish—
With—this—*(word lost)*
Fish—colder and colder—
cold

[SHAPE goes off stage. The crowd shrinks into a myriad flock of twittering birds gathered about the fallen player out of whose head two curved sticks grow. FUSELI and BLAKE stand beside him in attitudes of angry despair, but quickly one begins to paint him as a Miltonic character and the other as a man with a compass in his hands. At this, the player reveals himself as SMART.)

SMART:

I was his nursling once and chief delight.
No that's not it, though it goes something
Like that.
You should be women and yet
Your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.
That's not it either,
Though it goes something like that.

Come you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts,
Unsex me here.
That's closer now.
The riddle of the wound.
You think
this game has gone far enough, there's a limit
to brutality, bad taste; keep sex out of it,
think of the kids, keep it clean for families,
admit my act, show my hand, remove the wound
as I remove this harness or these coloured rags,
take my pay, stand up like a plain man,
account for myself in the language of the day.
I would prefer it. Cure me of this:
the rooted sorrow, the perilous stuff
that weighs upon the heart.

There's no help for it, murder or disease,
No way to crawl back to where we began,
As what, in whose arms, where injury was done.
When, under what forgotten star, blight,
Nightmare. The hammering goes on and on
As if to remake the maker or the made,
Somewhere to forge the blade,
Somehow the knife that cutting heals.

So few of the games without it: a groom
Crawling to his bed to slay his bride,
A blind athlete with murderous hands
Groping to undo the chains of love,
Everywhere the same doubled-lovers undoing
Themselves as they double and undouble
In bed, car, hay, garden, dark, noon,
Unseasonable and tasteless in their act.

Because there were promises and in their name
I ran toward the glittering city of the first poem
Toward the promised garden of the second
Toward the unsleeping hermaphrodite of the third?
But what I ran toward I was always running from.

And is there time for such a word as cures?
Say it is an act and I am only a poor player.

Yet somewhere a warden with a massive key
Unlocks rooms where all my red uniforms hang
As if they were me, waiting to be unhung,
To walk in their blood through the day
Toward some unuttered past which is now.

The uniform of the hawk
The uniform of the bear
The uniform of the king
The uniform of the steer

What shall I say to these animals?
Do you think that because they are empty
They do not want answers? That they will not
In some unexplainable voice ask the riddle
Growing with anger that threatens even you?

How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me?

Is that it? Is it only that?

FUSELI:

Of course, I cannot paint children. Only women in postures of the agony of love. As for brothers, what do I know of kinship? I am only certain that my time was not evil. True, there was gossip. They said in the Academy that no one could paint the hags of lamentation who had not been in foul intercourse, and that I knew the evil subject because I was subject to infirmity: gout, virus, bacilli, plague, prostate inflammation, blood clots, a limp, cold, influenza, fever, tumours, moles, dermititus, venereal disease. And the country itself, drought for many years, the cattle dying, and the food rotten fish and decayed eastern apples, my house leaning crazily over the hill looking toward the valley where the dun-coloured, dusky hills browsed like bulls, and the bone-grey houses stared from their empty sockets at the bone-grey houses staring from empty sockets; the miners sullen, and the blood-red police streaming through the cemeteries vowing death; the teachers reading to us stories of bears and wolves; and the

mouth of the radio spewing toothpaste and mouth
wash. Only the postures of the agony of love. Not
the good men, the lost heroes. Do you know where
you discover the line of stern concentrating
woman as she endeavours to manipulate the organs
of love? You must not look long at anyone, but you
must enter into secret agreements. And the entrance
is in the dark. Have you ever attempted to paint in
the dark? Not in the arena where once the athlete
lay on the ice, his random body propt against the
crystal light?

BLAKE:

Not to be born is best.
Born, to be unborn.
Unborn, to be born again.
Bear what you must.
Bare yourself.
Be only what you are
Before you become what you have been.

[Shouts of "quarrel, quarrel" are heard from the hills, and flocks of crows gather and wheel. SMART, now in the dress of MacBeth, sings, apparently to the crows]

SMART:

Light thickens and the dark makes wing
To the rooky wood. I know this dream.
In the great hand of God I stand
And shall be yet unravelled.
But not until the dark man in the crow's mouth
Speaks, and not until the wood is moved,
And not until the child in the mouth of the dark
Speaks, and not until the stones are moved
To speak and lamentation makes itself a voice.

Epilogue

AUTHOR:

I am my own plot
earth and play
dreamer and dream.

You were born to be unborn.
You are the burden of the word
I speak so you will be unspoken.

Shadows and phantoms
read yourself into darkness again.
I have dreamed you to undream you.
Making you I am the unmaker.
Read yourself into your rest.

MARY MIDNIGHT:
They have not forgotten the child and the tooth.
They will not be unmade though they will be hidden.
They are his burden.
They are his breath.
They are my children.
They are my death
And my birth.
I am the cave.
In me they will know unbidden
The comic agony of love
Then breathless ecstasy of death.

END

An After Diversion

MRS MIDNIGHT'S ANIMAL COMEDIANS

(from descriptions of 1753)

To you dear friends we hold the instructive glass
That ye may see your Shadows as ye pass

1. The Monkies Entertainment where One of the same Specie acts the part of a waiter.
2. Two Dogs accoutr'd like Soldiers which Shew their Activity by jumping over several Bundles of Sticks.
3. Three Dogs in the Character of Harlequin, Pero, & Columbine.
4. The Besieging of a Town by Dogs who are repuls'd by the Monkies within and several of ye Dogs are thrown from the Battlements.
5. A grand Ballot Dance by the Dogs and Monkies.
6. The Proprietor exercising two Monkies upon two Dogs like Men on Horseback.
7. A Dog who shams lame and performs several Tricks on the Cards.
8. One Dog standing Centry while another wheels a Barrow with great niceness close to the Edge of the Stage, avoiding with some Difficulty the Many Dangers of the Pit.
9. A Monkey managing a Dog with as much Art perhaps, as some People would a Horse likewise mounts and dismounts before the audience.
10. A Dog that goes up a Ladder backwards and afterwards walks round three Candles upon his fore Paws in the manner describ'd.

(The animals were the property of one Signor Ballard and were brought to England from Italy.)

LIFE SENTENCE

POEMS AND JOURNALS:
1976-1980

Preface

Life Sentence. A way of putting it. To be a writer. To serve the sentence. A life *of* words or a life *in* words. "He's been given life," the journalist exclaims. I first saw this phrase (used in one of the senses I want to give it) in Warren Tallman's essay that talks of the new poetics of perception as it enters Canadian writing. First, then, the statement of a problem in writing: how to say it? But it soon changed dimensions, became other things: something political, something resonating out of dreams—dreams of examinations, trials, streets too ominous to walk down.

For some time I had been trying to put together a book—new poems that seemed to me drawn to, compelled from questions of the kind we call political, various ways in which forms of inhumanity manifest themselves and then seek justification in the language of patriotism, revolution, law, virtue. I wanted a clear way of showing the great disorder in which I live, words that would be hard and pure enough to hold together the impure structures of our lives, something, as one of the spirits says to Yeats in his *A Vision*, "purified of complexity." I longed for clarity—and order.

If this order were to be found anywhere, I began to think, it would be in what I had been writing—in the books themselves, the journals I had kept for the past four years about travel here and there across the world and in Canada, in the poems that had grown out of the world those journals sought to record. So I put them together to see how they would fit, these poems and journals of four years. And that is this book. A grammar of a life. A life sentence.

I hope it will be obvious that I am indebted to many writers and friends. I want to record my thanks to those at Banff who helped me find this: Rick, Martin, Ruth, Sandra, Sylvia, W.O.; the writers of Fort San and Regina: Garry, Bob (both Currie and Kroetsch), Byrna, Anne, Barbara and Geoff; the staff and friends of the Regina Public Library who gave me a place for a year where writing was possible; the Canada Council and Arts Council of Ontario for generous support. There are others: Paritosh in Calcutta, Bill and Peggy New, Clark and Bharati Blaise, Mike and Kim; most especially Andy Suknaski and my wife Ann whose compassion helped shape my most urgent concerns.

Eli Mandel
Toronto, 1981

When autobiography ceases to be, then I shall write from the point of view of a Brazilian General.

Clark Blaise

POEMS

Prologue to Blood Lines

I

the line between beginning and
ending
        the line between there and
here we are on the thin line
between high and low
on the horizon
in the atmosphere

                at Cuzco alt. 11500 feet
                to prevent mountain sickness
                you drink   coca   tea   here   there
                had been   Incas   the Quecheuan
                people proud of their artists
                show you paintings: The Last Supper
                an Indian Christ twelve Quecheuan
                disciples a meal of mangoes and
                guinea-pig

in an Edmonton Ukrainian Orthodox church a mural shows
the Good people ascending on the right side of God
including Lenin the mayor of Edmonton and Premier Aberhart.
On the left side Stalin and Hitler plunge to hell.

the narrow path

throw out the life line

lines: line man, the line is bad, hard lines, give him enough
line, sight line, plumb line, by rule and line, fishing line, line upon
line (see Psalms 16 and Isaiah 27), purity of line, line drawing, town line,
line engraving, line work, line of beauty, one of the very
narrow horizontal lines in which television frames are
photographed and reproduced, line of life, heart line,
line of fortune, seam, furrow, wrinkle, line of bad weather,
outline, the savage lines of his mouth, conservative, liberal,
political, the same line, the dividing line, line of fire, 9th line,
on the line, into line, toe the line, up the line, down the line,

line abreast, line ahead, along the line, between the lines, just a line
to tell you that, line of verse, line of punishment, 100 lines
of verse to be written out, bus line, air line, a long line of
heroes
thieves
generals,

male line, female line, comes of a good line,
line of communication, main line, main lining, branch line, my line,
in the line of, copulate with, cover a bitch (see M.E. Old French),
lignier, lineage, lineal, lineament, linear, liner, linesman

and in Saskatchewan

correction line

as for blood

II

false openings:

history
family
anecdotes
psychological structures in

uncles
sisters

anatomical openings

as

anus
vagina
nostril(s)
ear(s)
mouth

the fifty-five others named in sacred hindu texts invented
for the occasion

they say a yogi cleans his nose each day
by passing a string up one nostril
and down the other

consider the string and the asshole

pores
then opening of the wrist
elbow
hairy arm
pit
hand
opening
the welcome
the welcome hand
touching the hand
opening
thumb opening
hand spread
thigh
the opening of the cock

welcome embrace
hugging the father
kissing one another

greeting mouths
weeping eyes

those opening inward
to inward eyes

the learning eyes

welcome

embrace

and the other

false openings

III

Robert Kroetsch greets a new day
"At least it's another chance"
nothing sour about this possibility
the day becomes   Lipton:
a spiritual project   its manifold wonders
it is grain harvest   tombstones co-operatives
it is beer parlours   possible names
as

Fishstrom
Lipschitz
Brownstein
Mandel

my father's place

I think of his language

I learn how to speak it again
to say it again
to say it as he must have
the new remarkable works
the sign painter painfully
with great love copied
invented decorated
scholar of price and inventory

imagine

living in the new world
knowing only the old
language of the ghetto

imagine not knowing native
speech

imagine the letters
the prairie's signs:

Spike's Pizza
Savemore
The Country Squire
Lipton Hotel and Villa Centre

imagine the end of
the beginning of
the lines

IV

and so in sleep and waking dream
we all come into the body's image

as in my torn dream of lepers
beckoning to my child, Sara,
their unspeaking heads

how Bacon painted that unutterable cry
the head usually tilted back
mouth open, or what might be a mouth,
some thought not uttered in colours
meticulous as Soutine's
in his slaughterhouse work
into the body's image we come
its languors and slipperiness
the drippings Sara remembers
about birth and the decimation
we call love

to be so touched

so blessed

by the meat of the

hanging world

On the Murder of Salvador Allende

1

hopeless + remote
you peer from a balcony
your voice light as a girl's voice
                                        your face
now that I look at it closely
not a pale petal   a photograph

under the flower of your face
it says here   in this unreliable
newspaper   you cried out
at last to your people

did you allow yourself
an impossible vision
                                    all your countrymen
marching in rows towards guns and armour
embracing the soldiers   drowning
the colonels   with kisses and flowers

or did you
fated and tough old marxist
turn back to your desk
look again at rows of figures
                                        deficits   demands
the hemorrhage of capital and reserves
the streets bloody   your people defeated

2

this photograph shows a gun
silently exploding
                                there are
above the city mountains
something that looks like a man
leans out of a palace window

3

I have been taught an intricate
love of efficient death

I respond with appropriate gestures
as in this elegy
                        funeral rites
for a doctor distant and unknown
my poetry itself serving the state
with its celebration of your murder

4

twice only have I met your compatriots   doctor
once in Regina a distant cousin who taught me
Neruda
            and in Toledo by the banks of the Tagus
the night sky brilliant with flowers of light
a dark boy his hands supple   singing

I know nothing of your history your people
your cause
                only a bad story about words
spoken at the coffin of your father

only this image of palaces and knives
the silent explosion of guns

it changes nothing: it goes on:
today in Omonia Square   guns in the mouth of speech
yesterday in Mozambique
                                        the same taste
of death and torture
                                    admirals calculating
losses and reserves

5

it may be   in the mines of your country
a dark face looks up briefly

in the hills remote and aloof or dully
an Indian stares at the sky

        do they remember names
        do they remember the morning of the death squad
        what stood there on the palace steps

            the morning of the death squad
            the morning of Lorca's death
            how out of bullets in his mouth poems flowered?

Aguirre: The Wrath of God

I will sleep with my daughter
this mad man cries and we will create
beautiful people to command
this new land which he had tried
in his madness to take from
Incas   Indians   his own princes of Spain
the river itself
                    how much blood
how many shitting kings
arrowed or put to the sword

yet the truth is
few came down the river
took the breathless green
mountains
               those dark people
in their madness 137 slaughtered
thousands thousands fell before them
their book of god

so Herzog's movie moves toward its end
the mad king tottering on the raft
I reach out/touch the breasts of young women
noting the movie ends with monkeys
as if they were rats or plague
anyhow images of lust   monkeys
making what we call love

Beware the Sick Lion

When he's worried or anxious Pinochet is dangerous
do not believe his anger is pleasant
do not think his torturers intend a polite evening
Somoza is deadly when frightened or bored
families have collapsed like shanty-houses in earthquakes
or under the roaring weight of a typhoon
when he amuses himself or finds distraction
entertaining dull-witted police captains
with examples of sodomy or truncheons in vaginas
the action of broken glass in a beaten rectum

So too the belaboured husband as tyrant
rages against imagined treachery in a young wife
there is nothing like it any where else in the world
except the endless torment practiced by dangerous men

a roman catholic priest jumps from a top window
a trial witness dies in a car accident, in the desert, no other car for miles
fishermen have found two bodies, hands wired in their nets (verdict: suicide)
a foreign ministry official who issued a false passport to the key witness
investigating the junta committed suicide after lunch
with three junta generals
A peasant activist found by police, his head bashed in,
both arms broken. Conclusion: train accident. It is noted his arms were
broken before his death.

the National Centre for Investigations in Chile.
The history of ex-political prisoners

No one talks of the secret police activities of Somoza in Nicaragua.
Only the earthquake of anger, the typhoons of oppression.
Torturers in Brazil.
Actions of the Peruvian military
The long lost afternoons of the
Privy Council Security Officers in Ottawa.
Tropical flowers are indeed exotic: read Neruda.
The poisonous flames of the tropics will burn out your heart: read César
Vallejo.
Thugs in the colonial backlands roam the nostalgic cities of Borges.

Northern plants too can kill: the old lion is dangerous
especially when sick, especially eaten by the jealousy of his wife's young body
her ass her cunt
More knives cut deeper wounds
over that piece of flesh than you can count.

The Spies

now we know about spies
the spies
            beginners in
the game of pursuit
the central-americans

how they learn about genital claws
electric prods for delicate holes

all summer the mounties kept lying
there's a list in the paper of their lies
and the law men, the politicians, they lied too,
and my wife, a northern engineer, one story
to me, another in a book of poems, a third
in a secret book. The question is whether he too
owns a secret book that tells a third story
whether they dream-up central-american games
about long afternoons of torture

now we know about spies
the spies
            and the long afternoons
of our summers

we though were innocent

or at least

magical

In the Form of an Allegory the Nature of Guilt

Initially the painting should show eating/
rough hounds/a tormented deer/
nude a white maiden in flight
hands fluttering to cover her raw slit
this can be elaborated: darkness
hair hairy hands red colour of eyes
other refinements
how actual the wounds
                                        it convinces
no one any more not even the artists
but the satisfaction remains

consider the shape colour of
the hairy pants over the familiar face:
that mouth
seek its impossible meanings
repeat yourself
ask it to speak to you
the wordless mouth
find yourself there
once more on the horrible street

Grandfather's Painting: David Thauberger

Under David Thauberger's painting
showing his grandfather's house
and that giant horse standing above it,
the town of Holdfast, wheat fields,
church, elevators, and prairie grass
the TV set turned to a
Saturday Night Movie called *Marathon Man*
looks very small and peculiar,
but the movie is about politics,
and Nazis: it has to do
with various kinds of torture
the use of a dentist's drill,
for example, the tyranny of McCarthy
in America of the fifties, Jews,
their memory, camps, the White Angel,
specialist in teeth, skulls, and diamonds.

You wouldn't believe how large the horse is
in Thauberger's painting above the TV set
and yet it only portrays a symbol of how his grandfather
ruled the land, the power by which the little town
was run, the motor of the little town called Holdfast
while beneath it the real powers that run us,
pictures, say, and how we know how to kill one another,
metaphors of murder, these are played out night
upon night and I watch them and watch the painting,
no longer knowing whether I should write poetry,
especially poems about land, about Estevan,
or about why I came back to Regina, Saskatchewan,
this cold winter of 1979 or what I thought
I might find in a city of this kind to write of,
now that my father is dead for many years, and my mother,
and most of my friends are in the arts.

There are nights cold enough to kill. They remind me of my boyhood,
how much I loved the winter on the prairies, never
believing it was deadly or that we fought to be alive here
though my fantasies were of war. That powerful animal,
this evening with the Marathon Man running,
running, I suddenly know David was right to paint him,
his grandfather. We stand over the land, fathers,
and over our homes and over each other.
We have terrible forces inside us: we can paint them,
green, acrylic, glitter: the form never lies.
The truth is in the long dead winters where we live.

Machu Picchu: by the Sacrificial Rock

There was a sickness inside me.
Bird of unknown colours.
And I thought, I will go to Peru,
to the high mountains, to the cities
Inca Lords built in impossible places.

There it will fly out of my mouth,
this hissing bird. It will sound hot
as if cut from the living breast of one
held toward the sun. The Incas say,
in their bird speech, the sun is god.

And the Inca himself is a bird
who flies toward the sun.
Thousands and thousands of birds
die every day so he may be clothed
in the plumage of the sun itself.

At the stone called the sun's hitching post,
at the altar of sacrifices I waited,
the air thin as a knife blade,
my mouth opening and closing.
But the sun fell into a mist.

What is the sound of oppression
or royalty? In their markets
the Quecheuan whisper and listen,
transistors muttering to them
languages ancient and implacable.

Not even in mountains so high
they take your heart out of your mouth,
not even in cities perched like condors
where the sun rides out of the universe,
not even now will you gain or be given
ransom/release. The Quecheuan whisper
and listen, the sound of ancient bondage.

Parting at Udaipur: the Lake Palace

In Calcutta a Bengali artist explains
his family lived in a tree swarming with uncles,
incest and possession. It is an allegory.
Then there's the other story about a mongoose mother.
The tree swarms. Later his mother
will warn him she is about to die.

I think of snake charmers, how they produce
out of a sack a blur of slither
how it clamps teeth into a python's head,
savaging the dull beast.

At Gujarat an intellectual lets me know
she despises her husband, academics, poetry
her unequivocal dark hands handling a book,
poems my friend has given her.

From the Taj windows in Bombay
the Gates of India imperial and aloof
open to the Arabian sea. The heat drains
whatever leans in the wind that blows from the desert.
The harbour fills with the blood of the setting sun.

I despair of reason, knowledge, my lectures,
remember only Ann turning away at Udaipur,
the boat from the palace creating distances.
We are in a strange land. We are drifting apart.
India is between us. Across the lake, its sunken
woman, lie continents:
war torture poison
an apparatus of romance
to keep us apart.

Fatehpur Sikri: Lost City

Having concluded India is impossible—
with or without Indira Gandhi, neither
a country nor a possible poem; with or
without her rules of grammar, her security
police, I write *here* what *there* either
is or isn't in India.
It is here I lose my wallet,
pay too much for an elephant hook
that I could never use in Toronto,
buy a slender seductive god
for no one, no reason, love and lose him,
see a cockroach no one believes I saw,
refuse to repeat Forster's words
which I then repeat at the first temple,
at the first cave, at the first dark corner
where a god appears in a flickering light.

It is here I can no longer believe
my friends who speak in new words,
or my wife who won't let me touch her,
or the sister of the Brahmin novelist
who tells me ill-fated stories of domestic
quarrels in a house that could be in Downsview
though it in fact is in suburban Delhi beside
eleventh century temple ruins where peacocks
strut on roofs of warehouses storing
cotton-made T-shirts to be sold this summer
in Toronto the crests startling beside the cocks.

No one believes this poem and I have written it
cold with anger not believing it myself though
it is true that the mad king in the lost
city of Fatehpur Sikri, or was it somewhere else,
cried the whole night in the shape of a camel
when he found he had been betrayed by his love,
his best friend, and his temple guards,
later took an elephant hook to his own
testicles watching the insides of his life
drip away from him, thinking only
the *shunyata* Buddhist worlds create.

Ventriloquists

There is so much to be said—imitating
one another: the act of love,
say, speaking with tongues. Yet it was a while
before I saw we gave these words
to one another and heard our voices
elsewhere than the place they were
speaking beside oneself, throwing voices
away across the room, to other places.

Now seeing him this way I know
myself an imitation. I hear
his voice reading my poems written by him.
Later in darkness
on the question of love
it is more complex.

Do you love me?
The question ontological now,
She hears only his words
asking a question about me.

How do you do that?
It is a trick with my tongue
he says and with your ear.
Look closely and you'll see
I don't move my lips.
The way the blade enters
is just as mysterious as the tongue,
perhaps not as deadly
though he has nothing more to say
not even questions now.

As for myself I remain
wondering where I have gone.

Poem as Person as Place as Words

for Andy Suknaski

If we could turn the world into words
If people would only become poems
If the stories I told were only stories
If the old magic about words worked
If forgiveness were as simple as language
If the loveliness of silence came after
words in the delicate pauses and if it weren't
necessary to go on and on explaining
If explaining didn't matter any more than
any other account of events and history
or lives or pasts or who in fact we were
or what we had done but only this
If beside me you slipped into the calm of sleep
as easily as if I hadn't spoken or had
and clothed yourself in dreams
If we spoke in the language of sleep.

Andy tells me of how the church burned
terrifying torch of a prairie town
because of a quarrel about faith
or a casual wind lifting the dead embers
he had blown to flame in his dark heart
seeking to comfort me with this tale
of domestic terror: death of mothers, death
of fathers, so I lurk in my wind-blown field
hearing the early blaze crackling in its threat
waiting for the nightmare that will wake me
with its image of a grandmother black against
the torches of the town my own hidden anger set.

what shall I say then of my friends
who find their poetry in threats or games
what shall I say of love that uses tricks
with words for bondage
what shall I say of poems
what shall I ask of words

peasant, your insistent voice goes on:
there are other kinds of sorrow you will see
think of the Ukraine, my people,
you, after all, are a jew.

If forgiveness were as simple as language.

Going to Pieces

First I begin to notice my sweater has unravelled.
Then it becomes obvious that my trousers no longer fit as they used to.
Heels on new shoes have worn down.
No one tells me about my hair's length,
the rash on my unshaven face, my bleared eyes,
glasses through which I can barely see
smeared as they are with marmalade, toast crumbs, and blood,
the egg stains on my moustache, my wife saying she'll leave me
for a younger man or at least a better poet, my children away
in anger or despair. Lately I've taken to plans to
swim, a Cheever hero, from pool to pool,
one county to the next, in the darkening afternoon,
toward my house now turned gothic stable with pigs and bears.

Oh the changes that happen. My body: parts of it
outside of me now like an old shoe
attached to my left hand, leathery and unwelcome, my visible liver,
white mould I thought attractive greying hair in fact brain cells.
I'm turning inside out, all the secrets spilled in the open
as if the poems I couldn't write took shape anyhow: pieces of imagery
stuck to my skin and hair, unused lines trickling from the corners of
my eyes and mouth, wrinkles of sonnets
mapping a face of wrecked words, the unintelligible damage of poetry
I couldn't use for vitamins, scurvy of lost language.

Lost. I begin to babble. Dream of floors
where I'll awake as a general,
the Shah of Iran, say, Somoza of central America,
my medals and stars gleaming over my golden toilet bowl
where I store my collection of razors, electric prongs, shaving mugs
with unspeakable bits of prolonged men and tendoned women,
while history begins to take the form of recitation,
rows of the tortured, mutilated, and deformed
lining up, each with his own answer to the rule of law.

Emblem of a Poet

fox won't do because though the character is right
the appearance is wrong

some kind of dog, no doubt, a hunter

sniff, sniff

he's on the track of something: notice his eyes

then the night creatures: exotic deadly
lapping nude women

the web and the flower

in the remote regions of antarctica or wherever it is
Tony Urquhart paints his doors, cemeteries in France, say,
gloomy little houses for the dead or only entrances
for Magritte women on their lonely streets melancholy
nude thoughtful write a quick chapter that a joke ends
something about old movies

quick he went this way and now has gone there
you won't catch him beside the horse

now there's a poem blossoming where princes reach out
to touch

before the blood

before the wound

before tears

exits laughing

Headlines

Bees eat through wall
Patient explodes during operation
faulty surgical knife blamed
Fire ants advance north
Computer malfunctions stock exchanges decline
US Steel triggers price war
Grandmother, 79, guilty of plot to kidnap ex-husband, 27
acquitted on second charge of attempt to murder judge
who dissolved marriage
Ottawa freezes aid
Woman tortured with electric wire
two men charged
Legless man flees
Cut in arms sales feared
Genetic monsters loose in Regina sewers
Leaking gutters eliminated
Albino gorilla escapes zoo
Cassowary escapes zoo
Black camel escapes zoo
Hong Kong Hockey game drives players around bend
National Sea plans expansion
Giraffe dies after making love three times
European zoo closes

Marriage Log

Traitors are everywhere disguised as senators
long distance swimmers or novelists
I imagine if a certain bird approached
they would cry out revealing themselves truly
as Armenian connoisseurs with collections
specializing in art-nouveau heads of Medusa
or that in great European zoos you might find one
wearing an albino gorilla suit, his white brow
furrowed in a frown of such utter bafflement
you feel pity for the whole human race

beyond metro, monsters have been born again
the professors of teratology are busy once more
their ancient skills called upon ceaselessly
I give my hand to my worst enemy
reassuring him once more of my love
there is nothing else to be said
the desolation being complete
so I watch gathering crowds nervously
expecting some to throw heavy stones
at my daughters or my wife
others to reveal behind their masks
faces at which I could not bear to look

The Geek

Virginia got the idea of eating mice
and biting the heads off chickens
because she caught her mother in bed
with the delivery boy, whether it was oral
sex is not clear from the account

lately I too have been imagining monsters
philosophic arguments with bird-headed men
like Atahualpa and Pizarro over gold and space

It isn't simply transformative
to have caught one's mother or wife in bed
with the bird-man or the delivery boy:

it's the eating that does it
mouths that were meant for poetry filled with meat
as if it were lovely or sacred that way
beautiful and generous to love one's friends
by licking them

now I have this mouse, white and pink
I have been looking at its head
this afternoon whether or not you're there
I will put it in my mouth, bite once quickly
feel the blood run down my throat
the wet meat stirring softly in its bloodied fur

The Gods of India

In India the monsters began to appear and though I don't know why a poet from Calcutta tells me the story of his family, an allegory I was meant to listen to and from which to learn of the gods: I saw the monkey god on top of a hill. The giant bull of the Jains on a hill at Mysore lay there quietly, sombre and huge. It was a time when the cries of tormented prisoners could be heard at evening the green parrots starting from the temple walls and flying in crazy arcs down the slope of air toward the artificial lake at Udaipur. At Agra monkeys took my hand as if to lead me away, their wise eyes pleading with messages.

In the palaces where we lived I watched the snakes lolling, their urgent tongues probing the air spicy as the red vegetables of the temple floors. Rats began to speak to me, in mobs. And for the first time I heard the nighttime cry of the camel; a man sobbing over his deserted wife, ludicrous, inept.

Listen to the thunder of the animal gods speaking, the hawks shrieking, the eagles mew, the vultures cackle. Down the massed alleys of Delhi's Connought Circle, they sway with their serpent hands and beaks. In the dark upper floors of the unbelievable palace of the Maharajah of Mysore, an unknown unseen servant of Richard Nixon follows me turning on lights as I approach passageways and turning them off when I leave. I never see him. It is the white house; the invisible government of the animals rules. They have carried my wife to other lands and into other arms. Each night, alone and bereft, I cry like a camel.

Adultery

One poet feels the magic in it:
we've done it again, changed
and not changed, guilty, mortal
entirely beautiful

I have a taste for vulgarity
that is, body, and technique
just how it's done, whether
metrically or too messy for that

how many lies have to be told
whether bodies are complicit
or simply indifferent, sucking
holding onto the realms of childhood
feeding as at exotic cafés with a flair
for style and hints of intrigue

not that anything is improved
by these metaphors only that now
the monsters come crowding in
new suggestions every day about food
about digestion about myself
seeing the gradual hermaphrodite appear

In a Colouring Book: Found

1

finish the house and the snowman
draw another snowman and a sled on this page

2

a few lines to finish this picture
will help the dog to show off his tricks
draw some pictures of
other dogs doing other tricks

3

a merry-go-round horse is fun to ride
it's also fun to colour
why not draw a picture
of the merry-go-round, itself?

4

finish the picture of the fireman
then colour it. On this page
draw some red fire engines

5

here are some lily pads
what do you suppose is nearby? a Frog?
a Fish? an Alligator?
Draw one or more of them.

Hermes

On the uses of poetry
my remarks remain banal
a god of criticism
concerns himself with mistakes

error # 1: heresy
to think I don't mean
what I say

worse: to think I mean
what I say

                    to mistake
confusion for magic
obscurity for wisdom

the more sinister crossing
you invent for yourself:

almost always it means
taking another's soul

this is why Charon's boat
ferries only two across at a time

and why the god's benevolence
proves neither generous nor true

ask anyone on the other side

Poem Like a Stone, Like a General

Poem, this is a confrontation
let us meet angrily, quarrelsome,
you have said too much.
You show no tact, no discretion,
you betray decent people,
you anger and hurt my wife.
Shall I ask you for revisions, recantation?

Didn't you make an agreement with me
about the nature of honesty?
Do you think anything is permissible?
What will I do later
when you have written all the love out of my life?
How shall I live like a stone,
a noted gossiper?
Or is that your intent?
Finally to silence me?
In the end, to live
with your own inscrutability,
no longer listened to,
your only point of view
that of a Brazilian General?

The New Man

This is the way in which finally you arrive at the image haunting you
historical, it blacks out an age of history, all of World War
II, say, now become only a night with fireworks in it, your daughter's
day, when in fact you know the new man standing there is the new age and
you try to discern his features. He does not look like a
Nazi. He is certainly not a South American terrorist, or novelist.
You notice his smooth hands, his unlined chin, the rounded features of
his face, his peculiar eyes, though
that seems not especially political.

The new man. Suddenly an image out of mythologies you read for
unusual learning in a country not particularly concerned about your attempt
to be learned and wise appears: it is the killer person. Not a savage,
not black or out of Africa, his brutality you understand is refinement,
you wish your people had cared more for the stories you loved and forgot.
What will he know that you do not understand, not having been trained to
understand killing?

He speaks to you softly about yourself: if you were expecting anyone,
would you expect a South American terrorist? And you say, no. It was
another. And he says, I am the other: his hands are soft and his eyes
bright and he has guns in either hand and knows a good deal about
your government and the reason for betrayals you never expected.

Portrait of Ann

Her story belongs elsewhere
                                        not in this poem
her ivory face tells of.
This story is of Incas
                        of men harsher than torture.
They eat fruit, flesh, fowl
as though it were female flesh.
Watersheds of the continental rift.

She leans into an icy wind.
lines of her taut face
implacable
as an Indian's
facing Conquistadores

Stern as a tall bird is stern
a hawk staring
an eagle

knowing the Spanish demands
for flesh
for bones
for gold.

This is the cruel story that she knows.
This is the love she bears.
This is the man's cry, its demand
for justice
                fed on jungle fruit.
Yes.
It opens on a massive river
a wild king gulping fruit
holding its flesh
as if he held his daughter by her breasts.

She is stern, royal, alone
now a tall bird in rain forests
above enormous trees
past remote peaks

The Temptations of Saint Anthony: Dream Allegory and Critical Comment.

As we drove south from Normandy along the coast of Brittany I would wake each morning aware that I had dreamt of animals, mostly birds in the shape of men, bird-headed men.

Much absorbed then with the mythic landscape of Brittany, its Tolkien-like mists and cliffs, its neolithic structures, its caves and castles, I remember once being taken with a story of a monster who looted towns, killing, if he did not eat, peasants, a Gilles de Rais, a Bluebeard of the Bretons. I remember as well being absorbed, as was my daughter, by the story of the Bay of the Dead, and like the little girl, sought for it expecting to see bodies floating there. I thought too the Côte Sauvage might reveal some piratical secrets. Once we did see a Gothic house at the edge of a dark bay.

Much later in Toronto the meaning of the dreams was revealed to me. Teaching John Berger's *G*, Ann sought out his critical essays on perception in one of which he talks of Grünewald's painting, *The Temptations of Saint Anthony*. I began then to understand the syphilitic figure, like some fat slug or worse, in the forefront of the painting and in my own dreams. The pinioned and tormented creatures assaulted by birds. The distorted human forms. Two kinds of journeys: the journey through France, through time, through history, through myth, to the Plague Cemetery of Rouen; and the mental journey of my dreams. It remained to find the link, though the iconography had been given to me.

Why choose mediaeval France? Did the journey through Rouen and Norman France, through Languedoc, lead to Barbara Tuchmann's history of the fourteenth century, that time when all the world was mad? Our way took us through gardens and green fields. Toward soft beaches. In Spain there were barricades and murders.

Birds Prophesy: There is Good, There is Evil

This night I dream of a man with a bird's head
I have forgotten old stories about bird's prophecies:
how my mother, for example, looking at fowl
called rabbis to consult books of wisdom and law,
listened to their sayings. Birds flocking
here or there call down a rooky night.

There is no leap a man can make beyond his fate,
even if he is a bird himself,
even if he can fly beyond these vast hills.
It comes upon him like night and the cold
in high mountains carrying the death of the sun.
It comes upon him like disease on beggars.
It carries within it the substance of nightmare,
heavy wings beating inside a fearful breast,
hawk faces, vultures inside men's bodies.

Once his heart sang, once he knew bright places,
nothing was impossible, not even love itself.
He knew nothing of the birds, he knew no auguries.
He was proud. He solved riddles, knew poetry.

What will you say now to his sick heart?
What can you say of anything that soars,
even the noble bird there, beyond the sun itself?

Rosalie Castro

Rosalie Castro, how could I sing to you?
I don't know Gallegan. And if I did
what would you say to me anyhow
hearing my voice, hard, western, Jewish?
A Spaniard and a Jew. It was possible once.

Would you ask me about farms and the prairies?
And what if I answered by recalling Evora,
to your south? Do you remember the eyes,
sunflowers, staring at us, North American, alone?
We thought of stars in the sky, your fields,
your statue of soft stone, your soft stone mouth
singing its granite songs, how you loved
your people, your granite fields.

What songs do they sing in the nightclub
they named after you in the centre of this city?
Do they play Gallegan bagpipes here in your honour?
Do these wild singers tell stories of Jews
leaving Spain with their books, silver, kettles, plate
fleeing down rocky roads past the raging Wife of Bath
on her way to Saint James' place, his stone coffin,
while my ancestors ran ran toward Bessarabia or Kiev
to my father's town, its fowl and moorish laments.

Rosalie, you have become a poem by Edgar Allan Poe
your face turned forever toward the stars.
What stories we could have told one another.
That Spain is cruel. That your people cried out
beneath the sea, beneath the rocks,
that you have become a voice,
a northern coast, an echo in granite hills.

In My 57th Year

This is the year my mother lay dying
knocked down by tiny strokes she claimed
never once hit her though when she lay
crib-like where they laid her there she wept
for shame to be confined so near her death.
This is the year the cancer inside my father's
groin began its growth to knock him down
strong as he was beside his stricken wife.
This is the year I grew, ignorant of politics,
specious with law, careless of poetry.
There were no graves. The prairie rolled on
as if it were the sea. Today my children make
their way alone across those waves.
Do lines between us end as sharply
as lines our artists draw upon the plains?
I cry out. They keep their eye upon
their politics, their myths,
careful of lives as I was careless.

What shall I say? It is too late to tell again
tales we never knew. The legends of ourselves
spill into silence. All we never said, father
to daughter, son to unmanned man, we cannot say
to count the years.
                                        I no longer know time or age
thinking of parents, their time, their grave of names.
Telling the time fiction consumes me.

The Madwomen of the Plaza de Mayo

They wear white scarves and shawls.
They carry pictures on strings about their necks.
I have seen their faces elsewhere:
in Ereceira, fishermen's wives
walking in dark processions
to the sea, its roaring,
women of Ireland
wearing their dark scarves
hearing the echo of guns, bombs

Identities
the *desaparecidos*
lost ones
the disappeared

in the Plaza the Presidential Palace
reveals soldiers like fences with steel spikes
the rhythm of lost bodies
the rhythm of loss

A soldier is a man who is not a man.
A fence, a spike
A nail in somebody's eye.
Lost man.

Why are the women weeping?
For whom do they cry
under the orange moon
under the lemon moon of Buenos Aires?

"If only for humanitarian reasons
tell the families of the living
where are they
tell the families of the dead
what they need
what they deserve to know."

No one speaks.
The junta says nothing.
The *desaparecidos* remain silent.
The moon has no language.

JOURNAL
VICTORIA, B.C.
1980

May 15. Victoria.

During 1967, and again in 1977, through various circumstances I travelled widely: to Banff and Fort San, to Peru and Ecuador, to India, to Europe, across Canada from Toronto to Vancouver and Victoria. To some extent, the result of a privileged position as a teacher and writer; to some extent, out of mere curiosity, a tourist's urge; to some extent, out of restlessness, old questions about people and place reasserting themselves. What answers? What patterns? When do language and place become identical?

In Regina, during 1978 and 1979, I found myself once again in the city where I grew to manhood—located as a writer-in-residence in the Regina Public Library, a contemporary building on the site of the old Carnegie Library from which I had borrowed those books that gave me the early metaphors of my life: the Tarzan books, E.E. Van Dyne, Nero Wolfe, the Ashes, *Chess Beginnings and Endings*, stories of war. I walked the streets of boyhood: Lorne, Smith, Albert, Rae, Winnipeg, Toronto, St. John, Hamilton, 11th, 12th, Victoria; looking on that prairie grid for a lost world of identities, for lost patterns.

At the request of Geoff Ursell, the scholarly poet-musician who had taken over the editing of *Salt*, Robert Currie's magazine, I wrote of *Beginnings*:

> music, sound, an irritant, something way below the line,
> below the stanza, below the image: a possibility, all possibilities,
> a blank page, a second chance, the first line.
> the intrigue of beginning: to cheat on it—or not.
> Writing as re-writing. Each new line another line to rewrite
> biography. Each poem a new biography, a biography anew.
> Bony literalist, I read (out of a skeleton of alphabets)
> the whole body that is/was one. Archeologist of the word attempting
> to reconstruct whole lives from the fossil poem.
> music, sound, something below the line, the word, the place,
> through time and timing of self, its rhythms.

That seems fair enough. It admits doubleness, duplicity, language. So let me add from *Beginnings* this too:

> re-runs:
> The uncanny begins with substitution, it may be the most powerful human capacity. Learn the connections of failure, ritual, magic: redundancy, reduplication. (The world begins to begin *elsewhere*.) Think of substitute worlds: the universal baseball association, Eli Mandel, Prop. The World Series replayed on the wall of the Leader-Post Building. The map of Paris in an old large red (blue?) atlas is Paris. At the centre of the world inside the world is the world.

> Sagan tells of the universe as a micro-version of a universe containing it contained in a larger version *ad infinitum* or of two semi-independent brains inside one head or of three brains living evolutionary history. Displacement in dream method. A displaced person adds a new word to language: D.P. I see my uncle's hands at the typewriter as he types the sentence containing all the letters of the alphabet: the quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog. It ends with an inverted god.
> Beginnings.
>
> Radio telescopes have detected the cosmic black-body background radiation, the distant echo of the event called the Big Bang, the sound of creation itself.
>
> Carl Sagan.

If no sound ever ceases, theoretically all speech can be reconstructed. Shakespeare speaking Prospero's words.

In the winter of 1979, I walk to the library in Regina listening to the sound of my frozen breath, the crunch of snow boots on snow, the brittle sharp air of prairie winter. The place from which I came. At my apartment, I read my notes. Where I have been. Substitute worlds. In my mind's map, I set each place against the others: Banff, Peru, India, Europe, Fort San, Victoria. May 1980, I hear Jack Hodgins say the sea that washes on the shore of his home is the same as the sea that washes on Marquez's and so South America is closer to him than Toronto.

For some such reason (connections) I reconstruct these journals.

JOURNAL
BANFF: THE SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS
1976

July 20. Banff.

Three days at Banff Centre and the "Hoffer Colony," which I will now title "Ghosts," is virtually finished; it organized itself in uncanny fashion. Writing virtually non-stop (except for brief interruptions by the students, who have not yet fully discovered I am here, and for restless periods of sleep, three hours per night). I've finally put it together. Or, it has manifested itself. Completed. An extraordinary burst of writing. Why? Need to be a writer—at a school for writing? Superficial notion. Recall of the double of last year? More plausible. The idea of dramatizing rather than describing the double—or rather anatomizing—suggested at once the whole four-part structure. It never ceases to amaze me how this sense of wholeness occurs.

The mountains still have nothing to say to me, other than touristy notions of the picturesque. Immense. What do they care? The slow thinking of mountains. For some reason, I look to the Andes with apprehension. They loom in my mind, dangerous forms. Threats to our family? myself? How does one *live* at 12,500 feet? How does one measure, take measure of, one's own humanity? Perhaps the mountains insisted that "Ghosts" be finished so that I could be free to meet their voices.

Day's routine, in a spectacular but by now familiar mountain setting. I have come here regularly since 1973. Walk to the road above Bow Falls facing the Banff Springs Hotel. Many shattered trees along the way. Strong sense of being *on* a mountain.

July 21. Banff.

Day begins sunny but becomes cloudy, misty. Emblem: encountering self in the mountains. Continue to write, redrafting "Ghosts." Work on: time, value, abstraction. Count pages, poems. Worry—about whether this is a bad book and whether that badness may be necessary. Meet Richard Lemm, red-bearded, sharp-eyed, ferret; Joanna Bochner, shy—especially about her family name. Recall meeting her father in Edmonton with Fran Hyland and sharp quarrel at dinner about TV which he scorns though he acts in it.

Physically, routine here familiar to me. The school's location truly extraordinary: the steadily changing mountains all around, now familiar, their slow mountain thoughts obscure; geologic thought, stratas of feeling. The alpine meadow on Squaw greener this year than last, the great valley of the Bow opening onto other ranges. The seminar meets and I address it on writing, a presentation as usual—a mixture of allegory, occult tale, Borgesian tricks. Sandra [Jones] and Ruth [Fraser], the instructors; less brittle, easier this year, perhaps because more certain, less challenged on their position, less likely to depend on W. O. [Mitchell]. Sylvia [Fraser], the ice-woman, dissolves in tears after news of her father's illness. She must leave; appearing more fragile, less sophisticated under the stress. To be fair, she is an acute person on the question of psychological games, probably a sharp edge for students to be honed on. Not really the sexual person her appearance at first spectacularly promises. I will be interviewing students for rest of the week, then seminar class. Allan Thornton plays role of organizer replacing Mary [Baldridge] whose attempt last year proved disastrous in temperamental collision with Sandra and Ruth.

Long talk at the Solarium with Rick Salutin and Martin Kinch, people I admire for their radicalism, crazy passionate commitment I wish I had. Rick is hard-headed, tough-minded, powerfully lucid, not at all rabbinical (as his training might suggest). A Lenin? Martin is quick, learned, aware, quicksilver. Fascinating mind. Out of the sixties, I gather. Both rebellious here. Smelling out orthodoxies.

I have to resolve my feelings about my childhood. Talking with Joanna told me that I block something off there. All poems of that subject lead to an extraordinary sublimation into symbolism. Something about a valley, a river, a cave. What is *there*? Poems in *Fuseli* and elsewhere hint at it. Not clear, though there seem to be memories (or are they fantasies) to be dealt with. Does the world repeat itself? At what time and how do you become aware of evil, threats, your own fate? Can you name their particulars?

Two or three impulses emerge for the Peruvian journal: the aesthetic of it; symbolism of self; the function of a journal. After all, there may be more to free fall than appears.

[Note: Free fall is the method W.O. Mitchell encourages in the teaching of writing at the Banff School. It is a kind of free association procedure in which the students keep daily journals and report (uncensored) responses, which are discussed in class. As becomes obvious, there is a politics to this.]

July 22. Banff.

Only a few words. It is 1:00 a.m. Curious day involving heavy sleep. Slept in evening from 8:30 to 10:00. Refused to work on manuscript until now. Couldn't complete two versions of poems for Annie Berner (my stepgrandmother). A spirit who longs to speak through me. Who is she? What is she trying to say? Terrific sense of one part of a separate form from me. Must work this out. One side of self, but as demonic and destructive. And this is truly so. God bless all loved ones tonight in peril. Pray for me. Lyric beginnings. Incompleteness. Who is Annie B?

July 23. Banff.

In defense of the journal: repression and disquiet obvious; taken literally, both are suspect, but substitution (symbolism) generates poems. The manuscript develops better than ever—and one or two poems, especially on Annie Berner, need further work.

Phoned Dave [Godfrey] and confirmed publication schedules for both books. New working titles: *Another Time* and *Out of Place*.

Phoned Ann. I love her voice. Put paranoia aside. I think of Ann, Evie, Sara. Once I saw them together as I moved away, they their way—in Toronto? Yes, the day we went to get the next in a series of shots (tetanus, polio). Three women, three generations. Profound and touching—all of them.

Evie's schedule for South America looks better now. Ours ok. A wild true venture. Worth it all.

July 27. Banff.

A note—1:00 p.m., a rainy, cool day, the mountains hidden behind clouds or appearing only now and again from white mist. Tuesday night read to a good audience. Tried out some of the *Out of Place* poems first time, and several earlier (now revised) versions. Some Jewish musicians were offended, though why I can't say. Most liked the reading. Meet with the poetry seminar daily now, from 10:00 to 11:30. Some tension, partly because I treat it as workshop on poems, no free fall. Partly because of personality clashes. Have spent more time talking with Salutin and Kinch. Not writing. Drinks at Tanabe's yesterday. Met Sylvia Richard with whom I'm on a panel tomorrow on "Creativity." Others there.

Last night, Jon Whyte attempted to reassert his presence here by planning pirated or illicit readings. Curious distinction between legitimate and illegitimate readings. The secret poets of Canada. Yet who has a better right than Jon? He carries about a huge notebook of poems and drawings, a fictional world of the mountain country and a childhood kingdom. One of those lost works in the mountains. The gallery and library in the town of Banff is named after his uncle.

Ted Blodgett visiting too, also a political move. His crisp, classic poems in contrast with his burly presence. Huge voice, brief lines.

July 31. Banff.

Seven days till return to Toronto, eight to Peru. Phone Ann. Friday morning's panel plays about in clichés with idea of creativity, some presented with lively vigour. Eva von Genzcy (ballet mistress) truly attractive. Passionate in European way. Talking more with Rick and Martin about the workshop. They will do a presentation or seminar but seem to plan some kind of critical approach, that mere free association paradoxically allows for a kind of imperialism instead of freedom, the politics of the family or of experience (in Laing's way), a version of the bourgeois family since it concerns mystification of experience. Martin argues that only a formalist approach can be taught, experience remains private. Much talk of films. Martin a fanatic like Mike (Ondaatje). Passionate about exoticism. Like Mike's, his voice "murderously seductive," gestures quick and secretive. (A card dealer's hands. "You may have to move quickly," says Mike.) Love of parody. Martin tells a very funny story about flying in Latin America, to raise my consciousness, no doubt.

Last night walked with Janis Rapoport and Tony (the male model at the art school, fastidious about his balding head) to the church on Banff Avenue where, in the basement, workshop–plays are read through. Two plays last night; one a strong though repetitious work on Vancouver drug scene; the other a prairie–lyrical–guilt work. Intriguing; works by young playwrights read in church basement while up the mountain in the main theatre *Gigi* is in preparation, Doug Campbell is at work and Mitchell's free fall goes on with young poets and novelists. Conflicting demands, perhaps because of the rich showcase effect of the mountain school. I think of *Stony Plain* and how, contrary to Dennis Lee's view of its direction, it established a sense of distrust of language *to enable* me to write. A narrowing in order to begin again. Will it be evident that *Out of Place* tries to be a book existing in the gaps between its poems, its absences? Considerable risk involved in the language it uses—and doesn't use. How to account for my anxiety. The Andes loom ominously ahead. What is it I don't trust here? What sorts of betrayal? And why?

For obvious reasons, I avoid a party of writers in the lounge tonight. Apparently one of those encouraging tears and remorse. Read in a desultory way, mostly newspapers. Sleep badly. Wake at 3:00 a.m. and toss—tense, anxious—until 5:30.

Journal seems to be leading nowhere, but I must let it begin to speak as we get into mountains of South America. There must be words there for something not exotic but atavistic.

August 1. Banff.

Feeling at more talks with Rick and Martin that they are of a different culture from me. Other sensibilities. My own sense that *Out of Place* is right in its language but wholly different from Rick, Martin, Mike. So? A puzzle. Where am I? Where is this place? Why have I nothing to say of the mountains? It occurs that the question of place *is* after all a political question, not a landscape.

The politics of mountains. Not that they're high but elevated. A phenomenology of space. That explains why I am told not to go to Fort San next summer. It is a more demanding place, defining itself in particulars of prairie, not landscape but politics. Hence home to Wiebe and Kroetsch. To be at Banff is part of a *high* cultural setting. Elevated. Maybe the mountains do something to one's head. Curious though that Purdy, Marty, Suknaski focused here. All anecdotal. Low culture. And W. O., the raw western story-teller, though his poetics are Wordsworthian and not Coleridgean (as in Suknaski's haunted tales). Are these language differences? Vernacular as opposed to academic or literary. If so, an irony since I was *not* aware of my speech as high culture, though it obviously must be. There's something else too: not only need for drama, but, in story the character. Isn't it Bob K. who's always talking of western speech as story-talking. It's a story I haven't told yet, though *Out of Place* has its story form and this one at Banff is pure paranoia.

August 2. Banff.

Paranoia. Big Miller's jazz concert in the Blue Room, voices attempting to be heard over the sound of a band electronic, inflated. Murmur, murmur. Buzz, buzz. There have been large men at Banff. Alan Crowfoot, operatic, huge in voice and passion. Reading in a crazy way (a group of us rehearsing) poems by Federico García Lorca. Douglas Campbell and W.O. Mitchell talking over scotch and beer in the Solarium after 4:00, about the need for physical presence, about the way the body limits the definition of self even in an actor, each seeming to attempt to overwhelm the other with presence—with John Neville holding his own in deadly calm. Big voices; I live in fear, walk about in dreams of disaster. As Big Miller begins, I think of a possible poem in the voice I never learned. Jazz in the mountain evening. High on sound. Meanwhile, the Andes loom. In just a week (indeed at 1:00 a.m., *only*) we leave. Real questions. Place and pattern demand reconciliation. I invented your questions in my life.

And against these troubles, place another question, immensely apolitical and attractive. I tell my students of particularity and design: the hidden self insisting on its presence, anima, shadow, against the stars two figures appear, one a bird, one a woman. This is Yeatsian. Yet how to show this is beyond the ludicrous and to be fiercely defended. Night. No stars now. The direction is east and south.

August 4. Banff.

An important day in the history of War I or II? How stupid not to remember. In 1945, thirty-one years ago in or near Brussels on a fateful trip. The discovery of disaster itself and so the beginning of poetry. Visiting WWI battlefields and cemeteries. A brothel in or near Ostende. Guns still firing. The brothel is lurid, out of bounds to the four or five of us who have found it. A fat whore eating a sandwich of bully-beef and coarse bread fondles me and laughs coarsely. Obviously, this is a diseased place; nonetheless, two of the men go upstairs with the younger women.

Suddenly I realize this is all in error. I've got it wrong. Interesting, since the story I was thinking of happened in May, 1945, not August. In August (and this is the correct connection with Brussels) I sat in the Grand Place reading the *Herald Tribune* with its headline of the dropping of the first atom bomb. Curious the mind's trickery.

Confrontation day today. Dreamt ominous dreams all night. Skits of free fall (actually today am convinced this is a reasonable conjecture). Also dream Ann and I are in strange house where the seminar meets and we are repelled by the food left over from a party last night which we have attended.

Rick and Martin prove themselves intellectuals after all at the seminar. Rick argues for the usefulness of collective drama and the collective as a mode of seminar work. Martin, at a sophisticated level, talks of need for study of structure rather than mere experience. W.O. is confrontational about his own experience as a dramatist: three hundred broadcasts of *Jake and the Kid.* He may sense implications that I have missed, though later I put the point as W.O.'s liberal humanist aesthetic opposed to Rick's Marxist one. As between old and new sensibilities. What I don't realize is that I'm on W.O.'s side though I pretend to be, want to be, argue on the Marxist. This is an old, old pattern, interesting. Consider how I incite gossip that puts me in an intolerable position, thinking I made nothing happen. How much did I push the tensions and why?

Jolly dinner at which friendships re-affirmed. Sandra, waiting to be pacified, Bill, Ruth, Allan and I declare alliances, while somewhere the other side of me lurks and whispers.

Talk with Ann, Evie, Sara. Three graces. At film with Rick, *Bad News Bears.* Laughter, sentimentality. Sara's orange baseball hat becomes emblem of our aesthetics.

At breakfast Larry Fineberg—a kind of Cohen figure of twenty years past. In mist and cloud the mountains looming. All choices remain open. Leave day after tomorrow.

Note: Leaving Banff.

So many astonishing demands on one's sense of self and place. Insistent people: writers, actors, dramatists. Ego, voice, body.

Am I *receiving* all this? Why? Is it a poet's *role*, turning on receptivity? Passivity, acceptance? I think of Eva von G who turns to my words for the resonance she wants. Negative capability. Let the world be.

So many apologizing for their lives.
So many wars of man and woman.
Loss.

JOURNAL
IN THE HIGH MOUNTAINS
PERU, ECUADOR
1976

August 10. Toronto, New York, Lima.

Hurricane Belle threatens to prevent our flight leaving Toronto, scheduled at 10:40 a.m. Weather office refuses to answer persistent calls. Nonetheless, after farcical beginning, we leave on time. At New York, we transfer from Air Canada to Lufthansa 490. Transfer means getting on the John F. Kennedy ring-route bus and following the circle through a babble of languages and alphabets: TWA, AA, JAEL. Evie notes Egypt and Israel are separated. Lufthansa is efficient, the decor world-airline; though I note glumly the hordes of children on board our flight. It seems to me many meals are served. I go through the *New York Times*, a *New Yorker*, till at 10:00 p.m., we reach Lima and move quickly through immigration. The airport is international-air-style. We board the Bolívar bus for the hotel and drive into a new world: Olivetti signs, *Coca-Cola*, *Inca-Cola*, *La Chispa de la Vida.* American imperialism, I think. Then with sinking heart I see crumbling outskirts. Factories and slums. The night darkness. Past plazas, colonial spaces, we come to the Bolívar, a version of the Montreal Ritz Carlton, circa 1958 or earlier. Huge rooms with large bathrooms, enormous beds, ante-rooms; Sara and Evie in one, Ann and I in another. We are in colonial luxury.

August 11. Lima.

From the hotel balcony, I look out at the city. White, decaying. What was it Melville wrote of leprous Lima? Signs: *Inti-Wari.* Yellow eagle over Inca god. *Manufacture Alpaca for Rugs and Slippers*, the best in Peru. *Wagon-Lits Cooks. Viajes Turismo Cambio.* Iron gratings not yet open this drizzly morning. The Lima *Gurua. Plateria Peruana. Silver and Gold Alpaca-fur Rugs. Empressa Financia Edificio San Demetrio.* Four black limousines. *Plantas-Semillas Y Apartos Florales. Para Todo Compromiso Social. Cinzano.*

Out for breakfast. Plaza San Martin: Spanish colonial grotesque. Like Madrid's post office. *Bata Shoes. Telefunken. Relojeria Joyeria de Romi Berncola. Pasteleria Suizo Alemans.* In Galeria along Union Street, very like Sevilla's Street of Serpents. Inca *Mazuzalis* everywhere. The colonial style intrigues me. Is this the Spanish version of Toronto (or is Toronto the English equivalent)?

At Galería Salón de Té for breakfast of *Café Leche y Tostada* and *Jugo de Naranja.* Streets awakening to Peruvians in business suits, sweaters and trousers, skirts and sweaters. Only later do Mestizos and Indians appear at stalls along Colmena Nicolas de Pierola. This is a reduplicating scene; over and over again here; day after day. Shoddy commerce. Anything to sell: buckles and belts, leather strips, trinkets, AeroPeru shoulder bags. Watches. Food wagons: chickens, oranges, corn, hot dogs, pineapples, melons, meats. Cripples appear. Indian women with children. The metaphors of poverty, of its structure. The real thing we'll see later in another part of this city.

At the Gaieria I look at structures: a glass case of liquor bottles, on top two J&B cartons flank a Chivas Regal, glorious in its golden case (like the glitter on the street:

mirrored rocks; or as in the Cathedral, the dark and faded saints and allegories of the zodiac framed by intricate gilded work with mirrors inset everywhere. Why mirrors? Reflections?) The three liquor bottles have in front three plastic glasses, each blossoming in a paper-napkin floral arrangement, the glasses blue, mauve, pink; the case itself is supported on crossed sticks over a planter of plastic flowers; the room is "supported" by square black columns decorated with gilt squares in abstract patterns.

I realize I have made an allegory of the place we are in, its social structure, its colonial order, its design. Doodling. And naming, all names part of the place: *Happy Boy* beside *Akropolis*. Chinese, German, Peruvian, Indian, Spanish restaurants. Tea rooms. Inca-Cola land. Corporations above colonial buildings around streets where Indians squat. Inca gods peering out, debased, at Indians, at Peruvians, at us.

In the Plaza de Armas, the old city square, site of the Presidential Palace and the cathedral, we look at a three-hundred-year-old, cast-iron fountain surrounded by figures, lions and dragons. Evie trips over the chain that links them. Pizarro, a wisp or husk in the cathedral; a lion crouches over him. The conquistador, cruelest of men, who betrayed Atahualpa, the Inca, for a roomful of gold; now, a shrivelled grasshopper, a shuddery sight.

We stay here three days, move to a pension, then fly to Cuzco.

August 12. Lima.

Breakfast at Googies. Small version of café reminiscent of one in *A Clockwork Orange*. Orange plastic stools, Mestizo girls in yellow mini-skirts. Fried bread, coffee, orange juice. Two workmen eat hamburgers. Crates of food brought past our table to kitchen: fruits, vegetables. Everywhere we see models, figurines of Manco Capac, the god-founder of the Inca nation.

We reach Parque de Las Leyendas by bus—through city and crazy-cubist pattern of new Peruvian houses, cliff-dwelling, white-washed in mauve, yellow, green. Zoo repeats the topography of Peru in three huge areas: desert, mountain, jungle. In jungle, amid exotic birds, an old floatplane rests on a false river, a scene out of jungle movies of the forties; but in huge bird cages we encounter a condor, immense, silent, brooding on the highest reaches.

Later, by way of Lima cab (the graveyard of resurrected American cars. How do they keep them moving?) to *Museo Arqueología*. The *Museo* offers a procession of Indian cultures: Chavín, Paracas, Nazca, Moche, Inca. A history in pottery. *Mitología. Figurinas.* One room is put aside for pots depicting copulation. An elderly, female custodian tries to shoo Sara away, but in fact the little girl is only highly amused by giant penises on pottery bodies, as if one's row of flower-pots suddenly grew genitalia. *Personajes* ("real" and pathological faces); *Fauna* (pots as plants); *Divinidad* (giant pot as god); ceremonial tombs and the skulls:

Paracas en Terraza
Reformation Tumor

Maligna Osteosarcoma
  even then
    trepanning
    distortion
Paracas Tumba Dos
Trepanacion Deformation
Musico Y Instrumento
Culture Cajamarca 1300 DC
Culture Moche 200 AC or 700 DC
  Rostros Humanos
  Mitologia
Patalogia
Sexo Y Maternidas
Habitacion
Musico
Ware Prima Epoca
  and later in the day: pelicans on the Rio Chilcon,
    an open sewer.

August 13. Lima.

Church of San Francisco: white stone, red tracing of geometric outlines with vaguely Moorish aspect, though the chapels are baroque and rather handsomely symmetrical. I want to suggest the jumble of styles so characteristic of this uncertain place. The ruins of empire and earthquake have left no balance. Supposedly, there is a three-ton monstrance here in the church; we don't find it. All the wealth of the church; the poverty elsewhere—on the hills, outside the city, the *favellas*; we have only glimpsed them. In the city, three kinds: Creole, Mestizos, Indian. Mostly Mestizo, a handsome people, though oddly short and often desperately poor. Everywhere the street stalls I first noted, where they sell scraps of food: corn, sugar, meal, cookies, gum, Inca-Cola; and trinkets: belts, buckles. A jumble. There could have been a Metis nation in Canada.

In the afternoon, to the National Museum of Art. Are we looking at the places that matter? Dreadfully derivative Peruvian painting up to and including modern period. How is it that the country of Vargas Llosa could produce such bad painters? The reality of colonial art? Only two works catch my eye: (1) a campy version of the *Conversion of the Magdalene*. In a dark garden scene, a scantily draped, fleshy Magdalene is bathed in a luminous, presumably holy, white light as she gazes at a dim Christ figure in the garden below. (2) *Origins of Cathedrals*: an abstract with a Blakean quality to it and, as Ann says, with something of the morbidity of the mummy figures one sees in the museum. Poverty and death. This is a death-haunted culture. Its Spanish roots. Its Inca sacrifices. The mummies—*almost* skeletons; dry skin hanging on them; curled in foetal positions, arms to head as if in ancient unbearable grief. They're found inside great stuffed dummy versions of themselves, like huge dolls bearing dead babies. Yet so much of Chimú and Nazca and Mochica cultures comes through vitally in their pottery: sex, music, pathology, everything has its ceramic image, the whole culture recorded in pots. Pre-Inca so far makes most impact. I note doll-like figures on a tapestry gesticulating in remarkably varied repetitions—Tibetan dancers beckoning to the mystery of the mountains.

At the Church of San Pedro again, the curious mixture of china-doll saints on gilt baroque settings with mirrors inset everywhere. Complicated tile work. And the incongruous name:

Snr. D. Ambrosio O'Higgins, 1732-1801: A Baron, Marquis, Governor of Chile.

The power of iconography: compare the Christian as opposed to the Pre-Inca. How much does the full organization of iconography represent, sustain, or create the power of a state (church) institution (army)? I think of the Nazis but also the puzzle of the Incas: engineers not artists. So little of their iconic record here.

We move; from the Bolívar down the street to the Hostel Belén. Now four of us are in one room. On cots; a single light dimly illuminating the space; high ceiling. Price considerably different. Bolívar at $30.00 per room. Belén, with full pension, $5.00 per night. We eat along with twenty-five or thirty others, though some of those do not live in. The pension apparently attracts casual businessmen with its good meals. Prompts thoughts of wealth and poverty, privilege and restraint, freedom and restriction. We move easily on the surface of new worlds, sustained by money. I write this under the bluish-white glare of one fluorescent bulb. Ann and I talk of neon signs, this art. Evie reads. Is it the new location that leads us to seek out the Sheraton-Hilton and the Ministry of Commerce? Mixture of contemporary brutal and cool waters of fountains. The hush of wealth. Like having tea and Pisco Sours in the giant circular lobby of the Bolívar, served by discreet waiters. Evie and Ann taste the Pisco Sour, a fruity grape brandy served with whipped-up egg whites. We talk of peanuts, the poor, our plans for tomorrow's visits. An image of pelicans on the Rio Chilcon returns.

In the Museum I have copied down:

> *Group Fantastica de Musicos y Danzarines.*
> *Uno* *Mochica*
> *Fardos Funerarios.*

I have never seen so many silver stirrups in any one place. The world's largest collection? How many horsemen rode here. Lords of the earth.

August 14. Lima.

Aja Paec – Dios Supremo Mochica

Masks and faces. He is the green of old bronze, but can't be bronze. His eyes are bone with turquoise pupils. He has four, bone, asymmetrical teeth distorting a full-lipped mouth. His ears, pendulous.

A death mask. A funeral doll. Astonished eyes. The mouth, a hole. A round hole.

August 14. Lima.

In the Herrera Museum: china necklaces, white gold, brooches, collars. Mochica *IV—400 D.C. collares de Turquesa, Turquesa oro; Turquesita. Chimú 1300 D.C.: unica instrumenta de oro completa que exisa. Vasija.* Ceremonial Faces. There must be one hundred thousand pottery pieces here, cast in the form of faces; priests, soldiers, criminals, merchants, the faces of a whole culture, a people long extinct; or do they exist as the Quecheuan now? A strikingly handsome face, stern, aloof, looks at us in reddish clay. Their demons too: vampires, serpents, monkeys; and their pets. Endless rows of ceramic figures, still uncounted, unclassified. Here a roomful of mummified figures. The museum, in Spanish Colonial-style, set in a garden of cactus, lilies, Bougainvillaea; out of place in the shambles that is modern Lima, its street vendors, its rickety buses, its racket of busting and decaying Detroit models of the forties and fifties.

The Tore Taglia Palace; Moorish, eiegant, remote, like so much of the impossible past, a hidden place. I feel I am coming closer to a fate I know or *should* have known. The Palace of the Inquisition. It lasted longer here than anywhere else in the world. And before that there were the Incas.

Tribunal Del Santo Officia de la Inquicision
Primo Auto-da-Fé
Fecha: 15 de Noviembre de 1570

Inquisidores:
Lic. don Servando
Lic. don Antonio Gutterez de Ulloa
Assistieron:
Fieces, Penitentes, Invitatores,
prelados, persona de lettras, friars, clengos y
person principales. etc.
Sentenciados:
6 reos
Lugar:
Plaza Mayor
Cumplieron Sentencia Lo Siguentes:
1. *Joan Baptista*

Se le sentencia a caral perpetua; A Zoo azotes par las callas publicas: A galer perpetua; al remo; sir sereido, y al usa del "Sambenito," par todas la dias de su vide, defendo. Cumplis las demás penetencias espiritualis y temporales, so pena de empenitente relapso….

2. *Joan de Leon*
3. *Inos de los Angeles*
   Tambien Llameda Maria de la Paz
4. *Pedro Sanchez*
5. *Andres Campos*
6. *Mateo Salade*

100 azotes
a relajacia en persona
dandola tormento "in caput alienum"

Inquisidores 1569-1820
Andres Bustamte 1569
Servan de Guzuela 1569-1582
Antio Guiterrez de Ulloa 1571-1597
Juan Ruiz del Prado 1596-1599
Jose Mariana Larrea 1820
42 altogether
23rd Enero 1639—fifteen
27 Feb. 1633—thirteen
21 Dec. 1625—twenty-three

On bus to San Martin impassive faces of Mestizos, their eyes watching Sara curiously, looking at this blonde, long-haired, little girl. Defaced walls. A prism. Plazas. Crowds passing, watching, selling, buying; street cries. At the Theatre Colon, long lines waiting to see a movie, *La Casa Numero II*; at the Metro, *Una Plaga de Langosta*; and at the Teatre, *Fe Esperanzay Caridad*. It takes us a while to figure out that *Una Plaga De Langosta* is the Nathaniel West *Day of the Locust*, an appropriate film. We now stay at Hostel Belén. In Spanish; Bethlehem. Bedlam.

August 15. Callao, La Punta, Lima.

Bus to port of Lima. Cardboard and tin shanties along the road. By taxi to *Museo de Oro*, the gold of the Incas. Wealthy suburbs intermingled with the dreadful shambles of poverty. A mangy dog at La Punta. German shepherds on the roofs of suburban homes, their own dog houses visible on the rooftops. Class structures. The place of a dog in the social order. Long lines at the movie houses, this being Sunday. Wet and cold. By 10:30 p.m., the last bicycle-driven street cart—of syrup and cakes, chocolate, gums and sweets, meats and buns—closes down; the dark driver moves it away. At noon in the pension, we were given spaghetti and meat sauce, chicken and two kinds of boiled potatoes, bananas and coffee. At night, we eat soup, eggs on rice with liver and chicken. Ann and I now sit in a little café. She has a Pisco Sour and coffee. I settle for coffee. We talk of poverty, class structures, guilt, our children. The slight mist, or rain, has ended. We walk home through quiet streets; only a few young men and women strolling home after the movie. In the pension, a gambling game goes on as it has for nights, more or less quietly, the clicking of chips, some talk. I remember a coloured man at dinner, alone, shabbily dressed but in cloth that was once good. Quiet dignity. Around me in the city, faces from Mochica ceramics, dark, haughty, sensual. Our children sleep—or Sara does. Evie reads. *Conversation in the Cathedral* begins as a journalist sets out to get his dog from a pound near the brothel called the Cathedral. The dogs of Peru. Later, we will try to locate Vargas Llosa's setting. In the papers we read of the death of the Minister of Transport, in a helicopter crash. The winter mist closes in, recedes. We are told how fortunate we are.

August 16. Pachacamac, Lima.

By bus to Pachacamac, a route that takes us through the barrios of "suburban" Lima. The hills like some Babylonian version of Babel; the tower in Breughel's painting; a demonic world. The suburban slum hills are succeeded by the desert alongside the Pan-American highway; a dun-coloured bleak land. Shortly we are at the Inca sand temples of Pachacamac, rendered more dramatically geometric by excavations and the partially restored mud-brick hills, the sun and moon temples. From the height of the larger one, the Temple of the Sun, a vista of green, irrigated land, gardens, the Pacific coast very near, breakers, heavy surf, a bull-ring, huge rock islands. The completed myth: ruined city, desert, garden. Hawks gliding over the hills. On the return bus to Lima, usual courtesies from poor Peruvians, a few mumbled words about Canada, much embarrassed laughter as clumsy exchanges of politeness take place. Ann has a vision that there is one man whose task it is to whitewash all the walls of Peru and since he can never keep up with it there is so much undisguised decay. Warm, in the evening, in the Café de Paris, we talk about the ever present, depressing scenes of poverty. So much unresolved. The failure of radicalism, of social revolution, of socialist movements. During the day, as we pass a small shop where a sign-maker works stamping out signs and names and I notice that it is always crowded, I think of the importance of names and titles. By the Ministry of Education, a crowd of scribes—with typewriters—wait to type out letters for Peruvians. Scribes for an illiterate people. Pleas for assistance from bureaucrats? Explanations of one's hopeless case? A restatement of an ancient claim? An appeal for justice? The taxis rattle by, decaying Dodges; the *collectivos* wait in line. Jitney buses roam and honk, crowds mill about. We buy candies. Typewriters spell out the endless cry of the dispossessed. It is not possible to understand this city. Behind the walls and doors of streets, what elegance, what impossible devastation will you see? It occurs to me that we stay in the old university centre; the university now closed and moved as a consequence of some forgotten student revolt.

The theory of numbers and concentration: power in dispersal of forces? How effective is the plan of the city in channelling its energies or in dispersing them? There are more than four million people in Lima. Mere chaos or political control? There is a curfew. Each night we hear rifle fire. Tanks appear at the corners of the Plaza de Armas at noon before the changing of the guard (a comic opera performance). What does the cost of gasoline or the number of bicycles have to do with where and for what purposes crowds gather? The city as a means of dispersal? Has there ever been a politics of numbers alone? Was that one of the organizational powers of the Incas or one of their weaknesses? I feel a chill of strangeness.

August 17. Lima.

Walk in the morning looking for the cathedral.

Afternoon services for the Minister of Transport.

Afternoon at Miraflores. The cliffs at the edge of the Pacific, repository for the suburban garbage; down to the beaches, the long Pacific coast.

August 21. Machu Picchu, Cuzco.

Reaction to altitude has left me light-headed, listless, heavy-limbed. Also, a bug is going around the family. Sara ill with what at first appeared *soroche* (mountain sickness), but now it acts like slight fever. Ann has a cold. Evie feverish. Myself, an upset stomach.

The trip here is worth recording. On August 18, we left Lima for Cuzco. At 5:30 a.m., we stood in the dark in front of Hostel Belén, waiting for a cab to take us to Jorge Chavez airport for the flight to Cuzco. Airport is like all major international airports, North American technological-style. Chavez, we discover, was the first man to fly over the Alps. The jet to Cuzco broke out of the perennial winter miasma of Lima in fifteen minutes, broke into dazzling sunshine over the giant peaks of the Andes. Above the tan folds of the Altiplano of Cuzco, a valley spreads out and a surprisingly Spanish-looking city appears.

In many ways, at this time of year, Cuzco has the colours of Toledo, browns, burnt sienna, rust; like Toledo too, it is dominated by its central square, Plaza de Armas; its cathedral and Jesuit church, both splendidly set, provide the focus. On the hills (mountains at 12,500 feet), the great abiding mysterious ruins of the Inca palace of Sacsahuaman. Largely an Indian and Mestizo city, mixed blood and Quecheuan. I think of the pun: Sask-a-Quecheuan. From afar, the Indians, a typical Andean people, are familiar, picturesque; women in high bowler hats, shawls and broad skirts, giggle if Ann or Evie look closely or stare. Closer up, one senses their abject poverty, abysmal; somehow highlighted by their wares at their market: llama or alpaca shawls, ponchos or sweaters, fine, soft, beautifully knit; scarves; belts; worked metal. Not the stall junk of Lima. In one stall, I see an old man listening to a transistor radio. Between the market and the churches of the plaza (there are several other large churches elsewhere in the town), tourist hostels, shops, businesses and familiar Spanish Colonial-style streets (the Calle Procuradores, for example, cobble-stoned, narrow, smelling of sewer, spices and herbs, meat cooking, corn steaming, beans, onions, houses tilting in their crazy cubes, doors opening on scenes of Goyesque distortion). The place spells seventeenth or eighteenth-century Spain.

Two things distinguish it. The altitude, of course. When we land at the airport and drive to our hotel, we ask each other every two minutes, "Do you feel anything?" At the hotel, we are given coca-tea to drink and told to take it easy for a day or so. A walk upstairs to the mezzanine convinces us this is a good idea. But we are driven to the Inca fort, a thousand feet above the town, and spend the afternoon climbing the awesome rocks. What subtle adjustments of blood and thought occur finally at

11,000 feet above sea level. It's difficult to avoid noticing oxygen tanks in the hotel dining room. Or Indians lightly handling huge bales on their backs—uphill.

And second, the Inca presence. Once again, from the distance, you had prepared yourself for this. In the usual reading: Prescott, *The Conquistadores*, Fodor, whatever. The Incas had seemed a Fascist elite emerging from even more remote Andean heights to impose their imperial will—the rule of numbers and line—on other cultures. How, remained a mystery, remains one. But an important question, for anyone thinking about a colony or being a colony. Colonial Peru. Colonial Canada. In Canada, we like to pretend we are not really colonial. But that is Toronto's talk. Not Québec's or Western Canada's. Regina feels the cold scorn of the mandarins and eastern politicians. Western paranoia is only a joke to centralists, journalists.

Changes occur. The Incas (Lima prepares you for this) emerged from and built on a vast series of fully-articulated cultures whose art and skills provided the base. Their own work, not as fully developed in art as other Indian cultures, proves, nonetheless, less militaristic and structured than one at first supposes. In the National Museum at Cuzco, I note the leopards (or pumas), the carved llamas and the ceramics. And in the Church of San Domingo (where a whole cloister collapsed in an earthquake, leaving the base of the Inca Temple of the Sun, on which the church had been built, intact and now exposed), one sees this architecture as something rather different from Fascistic, an extraordinary fitting of stone to stone. Its meaning a puzzle still. What do these lines, angles, fittings, proportions say? Clearly, the Temple of Sacsahuaman is both a fortress and sacrificial ground, its giant rocks (the puma's teeth) cloven by water, steam and wedge to razor sharp fittings; and the Temple of the Sun may well have, in its inclinations, astronomical sightings or placements. The star ships of architecture. As to the end of the Incas, the question is still unanswered too. To look at the question in one of its versions, we go, as tourists will, to Machu Picchu.

We have late coffee at the Chez Victor, a café-bar off the main plaza. It offers in English a typical Peruvian menu. The crowd could be Torontonians.

August 20. The National Museum, Cuzco.

I make these notes:

Funerary Trousseau pertaining to the same tomb:

> *Sumptuary objects: shell necklaces* (hualca). *Metal shawl pins* (tufus). *Teeth from wooden combs* (macchu). *Fourteen carved shell fish with inset green stone eyes.*

Inca Ceramics:

> *Interstice* (longeneria vulgaris) *of the cucufitaceas family with metal incrustations on it representing birds and families of felines. Bone rugyris. Cases of metal and wood.*

Pictographic Porcelain:

Clubs in form of stars (champas).

An egg-shaped weapon made with spikes, made of llasca (*or alloy of copper with gold lead).*

Steel pins (tupu). *Surgical instruments. Knives* (tumis). *Mirrors* (lispus).

Chisel. Spatula. A disc for Rucca (*for spinning*—phirure)

Bracelet. Spanish money from the eighteenth century. The Insignia of Justice (accorasia). *Needles. Earrings* (tulumpi).

Inca Ceramics:

P*olychrome aryballuses with geometric decorations. Standing out are the bichrome ones: four split horizontally and one split vertically.*

Mummies at the National Museum, Cuzco:

An adult Inca mummy in a braided straw covering. Funerary objects consisting of mecas, *for spinning wool, a bone flute, a sling shot, a wicker basket.*

A female Inca mummy for the most part covered in braided straw. Fingernails can be seen on both hands.

A female Inca mummy, mainly preserved in her covering of braided straw and sticks that form a kind of basket. The mouth is open....

An adult male Inca mummy in the classic foetal position. Note his fingernails.

Two Inca mummies in the classic foetal position.

An adult Inca mummy in the process of deterioration due to the climate.

A male Inca mummy in a perfect state of preservation with ears, eyes, and fingernails intact.

August 21. Machu Picchu.

There is no denying the grandness of the setting, nor the peculiarly impressive and daunting aspect of the approach from the direction of Cuzco. For me, the merely natural raises difficulties of description: what could "grandiose," "grand," "impressive," "daunting" mean except with reference to romantic landscape versions of the sublime on which much of the legend of Machu Picchu surely is based. We are meant—conditioned—to approach the place with certain considerations in mind: the lost city, the last secret place of the remnants of a grand empire, the place of rituals unknown to us, terrifying, mysterious, the impregnable fortress. But the simple facts seem otherwise; the village (it is not a city) is an outpost town of empire; its water sources ran out; the men were sent out to locate new springs (hence the odd ratio of female to male skeletons), but did not succeed; eventually the village was deserted, died. There is no evidence a battle was fought. There is no evidence of gold or gold hoarded.

The rail line from Cuzco (about two hours away) leads from above that city down to the Urubamba river (a headwater of the Amazon); from the dun highlands to about 3,000 feet lower to the semi-tropical gorge the river cuts through extraordinary Andean peaks. These wooded, abrupt cliffs and valleys form a startling and difficult terrain. On the saddle of two peaks, rides the virtually complete village of Machu Picchu.

At the train station of Puente Ruinas, just past a large hydro-electric dam on the Urubamba, the six passenger coaches unload. One diesel, I notice, is from Montréal, one passenger car is from Rumania; the others are equally international. We wait for the town buses, peer up at the 3,000 foot mountain above us, the thirteen switchbacks of the road running to the top. An extraordinary mixture of people—tourists: ourselves; a Cuban baseball team; a Spanish-American family in their rich dark sweaters and jackets; two tottering Australians, he grey and withered, she cheerfully round; two tall students from Vancouver; a geography student and his wife who is a travel agent. Many others. I remember the tour bus at the Alhambra hotel on Calle Texacuscha loading on our first day in Cuzco: a German couple, two Englishwomen, a girl from Detroit, a girl from Philadelphia. (An odd quirk, a time warp: it is now morning in Nerja, Spain, November 1971. The bus loads at the Parador, the McBeth family comes on: Jim, red-bearded shy, an artist's hands; Laura, tall and outgoing, something in her mournful but generally cheerful; Jamie who is a red-head about Evie's age but much taller; and Devin, the same age as Charles. We are about to become good friends with the McBeths, spending this winter together in Spain (this day to drive up to Frigiliana, a mountain town still Moorish, and then to the neolithic caves of Nerja).) Conjunctions of time. What event that day could have changed or formed this event today? I peel an orange for Ann; two bananas, one for Evie, one for Sara. The sun is hot. The Indians here at Puente Ruinas as quiet as anywhere in this lost country. The mountain waits. We exchange quips as the crowd of tourists presses, in the heat. But though we have come through to this moment, we have resolved nothing. And even as we hurtle along the switchbacks, the town growing smaller at each turn, though close, I know the story of Machu Picchu is not its legend. It is already in view against the familiar double peaks, too soon, too easily seen. It is a village, not a city; it is a ruin; it is in a strange place; it is remote—but to whom? A runner in the Inca days? Had he carried the message of the fallen empire to this place?

August 23. Cuzco.

Thinking of Machu Picchu. Imponderables. Not even an approach clear. Spent the afternoon and evening in the ancient city, taking rooms at the Turista. By 4:00 p.m., the crowds had gone, perhaps fourteen people left. Walking through the city (village), I feel again its odd domesticity, its plainness, this incredible location on a mountain, among mountains that could serve as illustrations and models of the sublime in a textbook of the history of landscape art in England and America. Evie, Sara, Ann and I clamber among stones, peer over ledges at chasms and gorges, holler across valleys to hear our voices echoing, look at the tomb of kings, the torture chambers, the hitching post of the sun, and I am oddly remote, moved and unmoved.

We return to the Turista, sit on the verandah with the two Canadians from Vancouver, the Americans from Puerto Rico, idly chatting over a couple of beers. Nothing is resolved. At night, by candlelight (the electricity goes off at 10:00 p.m.), we talk in our room of what I have written. The fact that the Incas—in spite of the spectacular setting of this world—seem never to have concerned themselves with landscape (as we would say) seems significant. Nature mythicized, yes; as sun, lightning, rainbow, moon and stars (not earth, curiously; crops, yes). Nowhere in the Mochica culture, which seems to have recorded every possible aspect of their lives: craft, sex, illness, decay, death, household tasks, domestic animals, behaviour, is there any depiction of mountains or mountain gods. More important is the fact of transformation *or changes.*

The Book of Changes is a very old book. Is a ceramic world a world preserved from changes? Why mummification? And did Inca structuralism reflect so complete an absorption of all the incredible richness of earlier and contemporary cultures that all patterns and orders presented themselves in a stone dance of eternal recurrence? How else account for the hitching post of the sun or the even more startling earthquake-proof walls? To arrest change itself by discerning not phenomena but the eternal forms of change? Was the Inca culture then doomed (from the moment of its inception) to have achieved the human godhead which is the pattern that controls all cultures.

In the morning, we awake to mists and clouds around the mountain, seeping through the village. We walk through mists, fogs, ghostly shapes. Change, changes, cultures disappear, here or at home orders change. The Incas came and are gone. Pizarro lies in the tomb—withered grasshopper—while the culture he destroyed reasserts its image and his imperialism collapses. The gold room of Atahualpa poisoned Imperial Spain, while out of the sand dunes, new Inca temples appear. Inca Cuzco reasserts itself while Lima founders in its colonial shambles. The Inca walls of the Temple of the Sun now dominate the ruined cloisters of a Spanish Catholic church.

The discussion is idle. We are changed. Peru has entered us. That is its meaning. To change us. I do not mean the shadow of a beggar approaching me as I sit in the hot sun in Plaza de Armas, Cuzco. I do not mean Maoist magazines spread out on a table with same squares, Spanish versions of Richler and Laurence beside them, or Quecheuan children begging, or the barrios, or the oddities, tourist curiosities. Pat Lane says he belongs with outsiders, with the third world, the exiles. But that is not what I feel. Being here, foreign, I think *history* enters us. The paradoxes of history make Saskatchewan less than absolute. Take the menu at Chez Victor in the arcades of Plaza de Armas, historic square, where the Jesuits built a church, the Spaniards a cathedral, where *Fiddler on the Roof* and *West Side Story* blare from transistor tapes, and where I read:

Nacional Baby Beef.
Filet Mignon with Pepitous and asparagus
Chopped beef with typical peruvian sauce
Beef Choops with vegetable and fried potatoes

August 28. Cuzco to Puno to Lake Titicaca.

Are we going the right way?

The question of Machu Picchu proves to be one for scholars and tourists. Back at Cuzco, we move to a cheaper hotel, from the pretentious Spanish Alhambra to the Ollante, cheap, big rooms with heaters (needed at night), sprawlingly pleasant. Spend two or three days moving about Cuzco, to the Indian market, the "artisan shops," buy tourist jewelry, trinkets, sweaters, shawls (gifts for friends, family). In its varied signs our street names the city: *Bata, Massey Ferguson, Caterpillar Service, Gestetner,* it is South American provincial, ancient, colonial, exploited. We return to the cathedral, the Church of San Francisco, Santa Domingo. The sun burns in a blue sky; the night is mountain chill. We eat at a restaurant down the street from the hotel. Order pineapple juice, orange juice, toast, toasted cheese sandwiches, coffee, tea, are nauseated or not. One night: chicken, rice, soup, fish; Sara asleep on her anti-*soroche* drops, virtually puts her nose in the soup. We see a Canadian family come into the restaurant. Ann's cousin and his family from Toronto. He is touring South America on a lecture tour on computer services. From Willowdale, Ontario, a University of Toronto professor in mathematics. We talk of faculty politics. Later, Ann and I drink Anis and Pisco Sours at The 1890, a convivial, European-style bar; we walk to the hotel in the dark. So it is; tourists at home in a strange remote city.

At the museum, after our visit to the cathedral and Jesuit church, I look again at the paintings of the Cuzco school of painters, Eighteenth Century work. Their iconic qualities.

La Doloroso: The Painful. Cuzco XVIII C.
Angels (cherubs) with (carrying) a well and fountain and ornately
surrounding a tree of the Immaculate Conception.
The Black Christ.
The Last Supper of guinea-pig, pineapple, the Indian apostles, parrots, and
camel-llamas, the elephants of the Christian-Quecheuan inconography.
A holy trinity of Spanish triplets-nobles.
    And:
    Senor de Las Templores
    Senor de Lo Temblores
    Lord of the Tremors
    Lord of the Earthquakers
    Anonymous 1669.

At the Orihuela Collection and in the Eighteenth Century Cuzeo School. Again:

Le Soledad: the Virgin of Solitude (a Spanish version)
Blakean forms in Cuzco in the Eighteenth century.
Or:
El Senor de la Sentencra. Lord of the Sentence.
Ayacuebo 18th C. Jesus Sleeping.

August 25. Cuzco to Juliaca.

In the early morning we go to the Cuzco station to board the train to Juliaca and from there to Puno and Lake Titicaca.

The early morning crowd of Indians, Mestizos and tourists is not as noisy or exotic as I expected. We board the "buffet" car, expecting a first class club and diner (as with Spanish and French trains), only to find a somewhat battered old coach with worn green leather seats (more or less the worse for wear), in fours, facing couples, a table between each pair. Ours is at the rear or front of the coach—not uncomfortable. An English couple and two boys across from us. It turns out we will see more of them. We settle into snacks, breakfast, games, and landscape. The thought of crossing the height of land at 14,000 feet stays with me.

There are French, American (a Dean Jaggers sort of man wearing an ear piece; a white-haired, firm-jawed, white-faced and pleasantly determined woman), Canadian, German, Spanish-American along with us; our waiter, busy and pleasant in the Mestizo way. It appears we will be served meals and drinks.

Headlines in the morning paper, hawked by boys to the crowd before the train moves off, tell of death at Machu Picchu. I buy the *Chronica* from a boy through the open window of the train—but it turns out to be yesterday's paper. Evie reads and translates the Peruvian account of the *New York Times'* influence on Peruvian credit—for good or ill is not clear. We buy oranges and apples from vendors in the crowd. The train moves off through the brown, beige, lovely red clay country of Cuzco.

Red soil and brown-roofed town below us as we climb the switchbacks to gain altitude for the run. Eucalyptus trees, varied cactus alongside, and, in the distance, mountain ranges. We look down on the town, then on granite and limestone slabs, adobe villages, later becoming mediaeval clusters of mud-dabbed and thatched hovels enriched by a mud-brick wall; all very like a ceramic version of a chess game as a Tolkien-like world which I once saw at Jon Whyte's in Banff amid the incredible shambly collection of books, magazines, art works that jams every corner and table and space of his little house; crammed, incoherent the work of a lifetime's interest. Pigs rooting on the garbage and soil in the villages. Here, a *hacienda* becomes the centre of an agricultural co-op in the irrigated countryside; the desert around moves back as dun-coloured and pastel hills take its place; bleached colour becomes evident: orange, green, mustard, more limestone and granite outcroppings.

We tell fish and stone jokes. We are high in the Andes and play twenty questions with fictional characters. Evie and I manage to get T.J. Eckleberg on question twenty, but this is followed by a rules dispute when Evie objects that Ann's use of him is invalid. Is he a fictional *character* in *Gatsby*? At each of many stops, Indians wait to get into the second-class section; women in their high white hats or derbies and their full skirts, as many as four or five skirts each, some wearing traditional shawls; men in the wool hats with ear flaps, for all the world like Mongolians. Patient, quiet people—what resentment, hurt, loss, suffering is there? Among the worst, the poorest, you see the obvious: the crippled, blind, mutilated, scarred. But so many stand before us, as we peer out of the train window, apparently unmarred. A fierce, sudden, snow squall: one man stands barefoot beside his mule, both have turned their backs to the wind. A desperate place to live. Yet what illusions we live with; I admire the strong white teeth of a smiling man. The raw-boned, fiercely blue-eyed, midlands Englishwoman nags her children, goes after the two youngsters, one dark-haired and mutinous, the other blue-eyed fair and wild. We see herds of cattle and dark bulls in the fields. It is impossible to believe we are climbing from 12,000 feet up. We pass *pueblos*, see sheep, chicken, donkeys, ducks; once, a schoolyard, and children playing volleyball. We climb along ridges, pass stone fences going down into gullies marking out what sort of ownership? The clusters of thatch and mud become more frequent.

At 2:00 p.m., we reach Los Raya at 14,000 feet. It is snowing. Ponies and mules by the station. At the left of the train, as we go on toward Puno, a vast glacier covers the top of a mountain. We cross the divide, enter the Altiplano. Prophecies and miracles. Ann speaks of Lima as a prophetic city and Arequipa (where we will come down from the high Andes) as a place to live, but as we enter the enormous plateau leading toward Puno and Lake Titicaca, time sequences shift and alter as the planes of land shift. Is it the altitude? The mountains recede, heights become meaningless, the bleak plain stretches out, peaks rising above it on the horizon. Nothing comprehensible. It is becoming twilight, bleaker.

From Juliaca, in a confused bustle of Indians and guides, we take a car to nearby Puno, both apparently fair-sized towns. Puno is only a string of lights below as we go on from a winding road to the Hotel Tembo on the lake. It is pitch black now. The driver indicates the lake; once to our right, once to our left. The road is clay and sand, barely passable, wet in a cold driving rain, partially blocked here and there, apparently for Custom's control because we are now close to the Bolivian border. The lake, in fact, is a crossing point. When we reach the hotel we are thoroughly chilled and the new modern style bungalow, with the motel-like row of rooms, is scarcely cheering. No heat in sight. There appears to be a small group to greet us; a rather vaguely Spanish or Mestizo lady-in-charge, two or three inscrutable Indian waiters. Our arrival group consists of the English couple and their two small children, three black women who speak French, an older German couple, all milling about, upset at finding themselves in this remote spot with no certain communications about tonight's or tomorrow's arrangements. Two Americans, pedantic and effusive in professional style, try to impress on an uninterested French traveller the importance of American politics and the dreadful conditions that prevail from La Paz to Titicaca—they place this hotel at the bottom of their list. It seems remote. We are somewhat cheered by the wine we order; we huddle about a small fire in the hotel dining room, peer out at the utter blackness. Despite gas heaters, our rooms are bone chilling. During the night, I become ill. All night the rain pelts down. By morning there are gusts of snow. I am ill and too chilled to take the boat out to the reed islands of the Indians with Ann, Sara and Evie and the English couple and their children (all the others seem to have left—somehow—during the night: vague memory of voices talking out in the very early morning). I retire to the room vainly trying to coax warmth out of the gas heater. Could it have been the food? No, we all had been eating. Curious, how illness alters perspectives. This seems to me the end of the world, a demonic desolate place.

You:

I need a doctor—quickly.	Necesito un doctor—rápido.
Can you get me/us a doctor?	¿Puede usted buscarme/buscarnos un doctor?
Is there a doctor in the hotel/house?	¿Hay un doctor en el hotel/aqui?
Please telephone for a doctor immediately	Por favor llame por teléfono a un doctor immediatamente.
Where's there a doctor who speaks English?	¿Donde hay un doctor que hable inglés?
Is there an American hospital in the town?	¿Hay un hospital americano en la ciudad?
Here's the address.	Esta es la dirección.
What are the office (surgery) hours?	¿Cuál es el horario de la consulta?
What time can the doctor come?	¿A qué hora puede venir el doctor?

Doctor:

What? (ache, pain, bruise etc.)
Where? (arm, stomach, etc.)
How long? (have you had the trouble)

I'm not feeling well.	No me encuentro bien.
I'm feeling ill.	Me siento enfermo/enferma.
I'm sick.	Estoy mal.
He's/She's not well.	El/ella no está bien.
I've got a pain here/there.	Tengo un dolor aquí.
He's/She's got a pain in the…	El/ella tiene ún dolor en el/la…
I've got a back/head/stomach ache.	Tengo un dolor de espalda/cabeza/estómago.
My ear aches.	Me duele el oido.
My eyes ache.	Me duelen los ojos.
I ache all over.	Me duele todo el cuerpo.
I feel faint/dizzy/nauseous	Me siento débil/mareado (a)/Tengo náuseas.
I feel shivery.	Tengo escalofríos.
I've been vomiting.	He tenido vómitos.
I've got a temperature/fever.	Tengo fiebre.
It hurts here.	Me duele aquí.

I've got/He's got/She's got...	Tengo/El tiene/Ella tiene...
an abscess	un absceso
arthritis	artritis
asthma	asma
a boil	un forúnculo
a chill/cold	un enfriamiento/resfriado
constipation	enstreñimiento
convulsions	convulsiones
cramp	calambre
diarrhoea	diarrea
dysentery	colitis
hay fever	fiebre del heno
hemorrhoids (piles)	hemorroides
a hernia	una hernia

indigestion	indigestión
inflammation of the...	inflamación de/del/de la...
influenza	gripe
morning sickness	vómitos por la mañana
rheumatism	reumatismo
sore throat	dolor de garganta
stiff neck	torticolis
sunburn	quemaduras del sol
sunstroke	insolación
tonsillitis	inflamación de garganta
ulcer	úlcera

I'm a diabetic	Soy diabético/diabética.
I have a cardiac condition.	Padezco del corazón.
I'm allergic to...	Soy alérgico a...
I'm expecting a baby in...	Espero un niño en...

Doctor:

Malestares y dolores

¿Qué le ocurre?	What's the trouble?
¿Dónde tiene el dolor?	Where's the pain?
¿Dónde le duele?	Where does it hurt?
¿Le duele aquí	Do you feel any pain here?
¿Qué clase de dolor es?	What sort of pain is it?
sordo/agudo	dull/sharp
punzante	throbbing
constante/espasmódico	constant/spasmodic
intermitente	off and on
¿Cuánto tiempo ha tenido usted este dolor?	How long have you had this pain?
¿Cuánto tiempo lleva usted sintiéndose asi?	How long have you been feeling like this?
¿Qué tratamiento ha tenido usted?	What treatment have you been having?
Acuéstese ahí, por favor.	Please lie down over there.
Abra usted la boca.	Open your mouth.

Respire hondo.	Breathe deeply.
Tosa usted, por favor.	Cough, please.
Le voy a poner una inyección.	I'm going to give you an injection.
Quítese los pantalones y los calzoncillos.	Please remove your trousers and underpants.
Quiero una muestra de su orina/sus heces.	I want a specimen of your urine/stool.
Voy a tomarle la temperatura.	I'm going to take your temperature.
Voy a tomarle la presión sanguinea.	I'm going to take your blood pressure.

Ann and the others return with stories of the Indians, a tin-sided, Seventh Day Adventist School on the floating reeds, its schoolchildren's drawings and its miraculous slogan: Education is Redemption. That could have been an illumination. Here, after all, we are being shown one way: holy education. The poorest people in the world, floating on a cold lake, at an impossible altitude: education? Another way: politics. I will hear of that soon enough. Is there another route?

Afternoon. Preparing to leave, we convince the Indian waiter to put a fire on in the main room of the hotel. It doesn't serve me. I begin to shiver violently. When I pay the bill, I watch the Indian's painful struggle with numbers and I'm strangely moved by his bitter and sorrowful exasperation when he believes he has made an error which, as it turns out, and to my great relief, is not an error after all. His expression stays with me, as does his struggle with an oxygen cylinder. A bill and an oxygen cylinder: definitions.

We finally get into a jitney which will take us, the last to leave Hotel Tembo, to Puno, the air colder than ever, my shuddering worse than ever. For the first time on the trip, arrangements break down, at Puno. The military have taken over the rail line for the overnight run across the Andes to Arequipa. We face a long night sitting up on a "buffet." I'm thoroughly ill by now and know it's impossible. All our plans are booked weeks ahead. Long wrangling brings about a compromise. We'll have a hotel room and will drive by *collectivo* (taxi, in fact) across the Andes. It all comes together, then, the long days in Banff alone or at home talking of this, all that I have thought. Those mountains now will present themselves to me.

Later, in bed in the hotel, with a heater working (though the electricity periodically fades out) I begin to feel euphoric, dismiss all premonitions as silly, all interpretations as nonsense. The choices are simple: education, politics, luck, endurance. In the morning, Sara is sick, but we drive off anyway.

August 27. In the Andes.

An incredible day. In a chattering old *collectivo* (Dodge?) we drive out of Puno and across the Andes on what look like side roads; height of land, 16,000 feet at Patti, where we lunch on Fanta, Inca-Cola, and hot coca-tea (Ann's choice). Patti is two adobe huts and a circular *servicio* which Evie, who uses it, assures us has no hole, *no* facilities but ground. This is the road for trucking supplies to Puno and Juliaca, the only route. All day we encounter big trucks rumbling up the mountains. We're well above the tree line; the only growth here is lichen in the snow. Chinchillas flit by. Off in remote valleys, we see flamingoes in huge numbers, near a salt lake. Herds of vicuna. The answer to the mountains is simply their presence. Nothing more, nor less. A giant volcano begins to take shape. El Mysti. Three hours later, we have taken giant loops to its mid-centre, at about 7,500 feet, and are entering the quiet white city of Arequipa. At the very entrance, we meet another car going up the hill. The driver leans out, pointing up the truck run we've just come down, "Are we going the right way?" he asks. What other way to go? I think. We will be staying at the Hotel Jerusalem.

August 28. Arequipa.

Arequipa proves to be a pleasant place, as if the lower altitude has tempered the level of intensity with which to live: white stone churches (we hear a folk mass sung in a truly elegant San Franciscan church); we sit under flowering trees in the square; we look out at the volcano. A friendly Peruvian woman guides us to a house with a patio and walled garden in the old Spanish style where we get two rooms cheaply with splendid breakfasts of cakes, toast, tea, coca. A great improvement on our somewhat grotty and infested Hotel Jerusalem. We sit in the warm sun on the patio, decide whether to move on or not. Calm. Resting. A pastoral. Five days. We fly to Lima.

September 1. Lima.

Flying by jet to Lima, we cross the Nazca lines. Sara claims to have discerned the spider. I know *Chariot of the Gods* has no defensible scientific thesis. The geometry of lines is not beyond the Nazcas and the astronomy is entirely accessible. Those high places stay in your mind, nonetheless, as does the Inca architecture. We move to the Continental Sheraton, North American chic, expensive, cool. I sit in the bar, drink Pisco Sours, eat hot peanuts. Think of altitude.

September 2. Trujillo.

An oasis city of the huge desert that stretches from Chile to here, but wealthy and provincial. We stay in a big hotel on fine square marred by a hideous, even ludicrous sculpture of a god-man, celebrating war heroes, apparently holding one foot up by his large toe. We encounter, in a candy shop, Canadians who apparently are here as mining engineers or forestry experts. A one day visit to sand-dune archeological reconstructions of Chan Chan; "The Biggest Mud City in the World" the notice informs us. Reminiscent of Calgary, but it has the enormous squares and ceremonial areas of an Inca city, though it is pre-Inca. Interestingly, the dig is by Canadians, archeologists from the Royal Ontario Museum. We drive as well to two giant pyramids (*huacas*), the two largest pre-Columbian pyramids in Latin America; a temple of the sun and of the moon, that astronomy again; *Hamlet's Mill.* Is there a plot line, a structure for poems here? The pyramids are made of adobe brick, but there are rumours of inner chambers.

September 4.

We drive to a little fishing port a few miles from the city. Tremendous Pacific rollers coming in. Evie and Sara play on the beach, looking for shells. Ann and I drink beer in a resort café. The whole thing reminiscent of Brighton, except for desert surrounding us. Reed boats are visible, lined up by the dock, ancient memory. Drive back to town in bus with noisy young passengers. Dine again in the Graham Greene atmosphere of the hotel. (Slightly decadent, but once wealthy.) Fish and white wine, served by formally dressed waiters in a very large room. White cloth. Silver. Incongruous places. We seem no longer in Peru.

September 5. Lima.

Collectivo picks us up in the early morning dark to drive to Lima. Spectacular drive along coastal desert, through towns still showing effects of huge earthquakes; some dunes are 30 km long. Sweeping down long curves to towns. Arrive tired, but hungry enough to dine out. Find a good local restaurant and eat hugely of soups and *ceviche*. Later sit at café at corner where Vargas Llosa begins *Conversations* with journalists talking. Tomorrow we leave for Ecuador. I have no idea what it's all come to, but I am content.

September 6. Quito.

Sara is ill as we fly on Braniff to Quito. Marvellous breakfast of fruit, cakes, eggs, sausages. And an incredible sight as the jet dips toward the core of gigantic snow-covered smoking volcano. We land, at 9,000 feet, and locate at once the Quito short wave tower whose signals we have often heard, a peculiar structure which, it takes me a day to discover, is a kind of guardian angel. Sara has tonsilitis, which means we must take turns staying with her and are somewhat limited in our time. Ann, Evie, and I spell each other off, but we locate an anthropological museum, main square, old city. We stay in ritzy Colon International.

September 10. Quito.

We prepare to leave. Sara is better. We have seen the museum and confirm suspicions about odd connections of Pacific and pre-Columbian cultures. India seems to have been linked here with ancient cultures. The oddities of then and now stay with me, in this good hotel. Evie has found a room in the old town and we talk of the paradoxes of her $1.50 room and our $60.00 room and her plans to travel by herself from here to home. Long talk last night. This morning she is obviously tense and holds herself in until we say goodbye. Then she cries.

What is there to say? Don't worry, you'll be fine. I love you. Look after yourself. What is there to say?

JOURNAL

INDIA:

THE INVISIBLE COUNTRY

DECEMBER 1976 TO JANUARY 1977

December 3. Toronto.

Today, two books completed—finally. *Out of Place* will be designed by Ann, *Another Time* in Dave's hands. We spend one day at the University, one at the Press [Porcépic] with Ellen, talking out problems of design and structure. The Press is in a one-hundred-year old house at Erin, a grand mix of Porcépic books, and machinery (including James Reaney's old proof press for *Alphabet* on which Tim Inkster set *Stony Plain*) and the computers Dave likes to work with. It is agreed that Ann will do the layout of photographs and poems, a painstaking piece of meticulously detailed design. It's out of my hands now, but almost at once, for God knows what stupid reason, I begin to play about with the idea of another book. No sense of how or where or why to go. But I know, given the way my life works itself out, soon enough I will be struggling to make or allow new poems to take a special shape. I have always been ambitious.

This is, oddly enough, my fifty-fourth birthday. At 11:00 a.m. the phone rings with a surprising query. I can see from Ann's face that she guesses what the call means. Earlier, Michael Ondaatje had told us he has been invited to read in India. A conference of some sort. Now, the Department of External Affairs calls to ask whether I would be willing to spend a month in India lecturing on Canadian writing to four or five Indian universities. There is no question in our minds. We will travel to India with the Ondaatjes, join there with Bill and Peggy New (from Vancouver, Bill to lecture with me). Conjunctions.

December 30-31. New York—New Delhi.

As usual, with our flight arranged, the weather turns threatening. I suggest, over some domestic protest, that we try to bypass the bad weather by flying to New York in the morning rather than evening, spending the day in the city, to meet the Ondaatjes at John F. Kennedy at 7:30 p.m. for departure to India.

We pass the endless, confusing hours of the flight with books (Mike reads Paul Theroux's *Great Railway Bazaar*, an account of a trip to India); papers (New York *Times*, London *Times*); movies (two); meals (repeatedly); wine (ceaselessly); all sequences lost. Occasionally, glimpses of a frozen, harsh world below, desert, mountains. Other possibilities seem to me opening at every stage: London, Frankfurt, Tehran. I have no idea of what, no feeling for the world I should be connecting with.

The morning of December 31st, 1976, we arrive at another international airport, New Delhi. The babel of immigration, customs. Soon we are sleeping in our room at Claridge's, a comfortable, English-style hotel. I have not yet seen the cockroaches. At 4:30 p.m., we wake up, sort through our mail, noting invitations to the High Commissioner's for New Year's Eve, from the Commonwealth Literature Conference for meetings. We find a lounge willing to serve "breakfast," chicken sandwiches and tea.

Mike and Kim join us. We're all hyper, the sense of a strange, enormous culture around us, somewhere in the gathering dusk. Mike tells of how, at his breakfast on the terrace, earlier, a hawk swooped down to steal his omelette. Ann and I decide to find our way to a nearby Indian "market," in fact, a sort of small shopping centre. We think it extraordinarily exotic, but really it is little more than some food stores, a drug store, a photography shop, a book store, a clothing shop or tailor's. It is the odours and colours, the dark skin, the saris that take our senses. In days to come, I am going to feel more than once this notion of having been cheated sometimes by the sensory world, sometimes by my own inflated expectations.

The New Year's Eve party, for instance. It begins as if it were some Indian ceremony—in a *shamyata*, banquet tents heated by charcoal-burning braziers; the women in saris, the men in cloaks or frock-coats, except of course, for the English and Canadian diplomats. But the dinner served deflects all romance: roast turkey, green peas, potatoes. Later, comic confusion, as we find ourselves in what looks very like a fifties "rec" room, dancing to rock music played by young Indian musicians. We fill our pockets with bottles of good, but marvellously "cheap" embassy champagne, retire to our hotel rooms for a drunken late supper of tomato sandwiches, toast the New Year in, feeling confused, boozy, remote, perhaps even lonely; somewhere, the beginning of the most mysterious, unyielding of all poems. India remains far from us yet.

January 3-4. New Delhi.

We are here and not here. The Conference of Commonwealth Literature records our presence but lists in its schedule of events only one Canadian on the reading schedule and he is virtually invisible since, so far as I am aware, he has never published poetry in Canada. Determined nonetheless to fulfil obligations, Mike arranges a showing of his *The Farm Show*. Bill New, who has arrived with Peggy via Singapore, gives a brilliant paper on dialect and fiction. Mike agrees to perform at noon-time readings, the ten minutes granted to each poet on the lawn outside the tent set out for meals at the Institute where the conference is being held. Clark Blaise and his wife, Bharati Mukherjee, who have played a large role in arranging our invitation here, preside amusedly over our confused activities, guiding us in the trips and the expected behaviour.

We are, after all, typical Canadians, I begin to see. Clark, a professor on leave from Sir George Williams, completing with Bharati a dual memoir, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, is engaged in one of his perennial attempts at finding his boundaries, no easy task since he is complicated, many-faceted; a Canadian educated in America who lived in Florida and Montréal, married to a Brahmin-Hindu woman, his life combining crisis and achievement. "We live amid sharks," he says to me—we seek to define the sharks and the victims among Canadian writers. He moves clumsily. "I could never play ball," he says. But I suddenly note the flashing motion of a parry, a thrust. His wife, so beautiful and richly dark, is American in India, Hindu in America; jeans here, saris there. A novelist, she is head of the Shastri Institute for Canadian-Indian Research for this year. Like Clark, always an exile. The politics of exile, perhaps her specialty, certainly his. Bill New, *Among Worlds*. His book, his definition: a modernist, living in the country of language. I had not known of his intensity before, or his adeptness. We are, we *have* our accents. The west is articulated as another language in Canada. But oddly, neither Peggy (who has got a bad cough on the flight here), nor Bill is at *home* away from home. The politics of exile. Mike is from Sri Lanka, educated in England and Canada but still speaks in the upper-class voice of the older culture. The poised, cultivated connoisseur of violence, but shy, modest, reticent. His remoteness from events is attractive. The odd juxtapositions: it begins to seem to me that we define ourselves, as Canadians, in our absences, in our lapses. I think of Kim's uneasiness here, of Ann's nervousness (usually so cool, reserved, she talks of her skin prickling). It has been said before, but we are not who we are. No wonder we haven't been noticed.

I find myself sullen and withdrawn. I stay away from seminars, prowl idly among book displays. Ranu, Bharati's sister—and like her an American educated Ph.D., now a professor at Gujarat—watches me with sardonic amusement. "You haven't said a word to anyone at the conference. You haven't introduced yourself to anyone. Why? Anyhow, it *is* funny." "I'm not really interested," I answer her. But that's only a half-truth. She intrigues me. Why is she aloof from it all too? "Oh, there's nothing important going on here." There's a deep—*cynicism* would be too strong a word—*despair*, *hopelessness*, might be better. "What good would it do to talk?"

Somewhere in our exiles, that hopelessness, the feelings I have been suppressing, surge up. There, I glimpse the tide of my own life again, the absence that is presence. Then it's gone. Only Ranu's sardonic laugh.

Later, we meet several young poets, also *outside* the seminar. They form a kind of anti-conference group. They wear army jackets and boots, read Olson and Williams, write projective verse in English. From my point of view, the conference is a loss and I think instead of my lecture yet to come at universities here with Bill. Which is what I have been asked to do.

We visit Connought Square, the great Delhi circle of shops, movies, stalls and booths, sandalwood pens and gods; silks to be made up at once into skirts, shawls, saris, shirts; brass gods, gongs, snakeskins, wooden snakes. The Khan market, which we visited New Year's Eve, surprises us with how good its little book store turns out to be. We browse there for hours. Nearby, we find Bu-Halmas Garden and Tombs, snake charmers at the entrance with their cobras and pythons, parrots and peacocks on the lawn. Ann, Kim and I visit the sixteenth-century Tomb of Hunayan, the first example of Charbagh [Grid of Squares], and tomb of the last Mogul Emperor of Delhi, captured here by one Lieutenant Hodson. The cry of hawks and crows, the flight of sparrows.

At a cocktail party for delegates to the conference, mistaken by an Indian professor for someone from Simon Fraser University, I am convinced I have become invisible.

January 5-6. New Delhi—Khajrāho.

On the night of the fourth, we have dinner at the Moti Mahal in Old Delhi with Clark, Bharati, Ranu, Mike and Kim: *tandoori* chicken, chicken *pakora*, butter chicken, *nan*, with *kulfis*, betel-leaves spiced as dessert to chew. This is Muslim style on long wooden tables made of saw-horses and boards; Coca-Cola (no alcohol) served; white-dhoti servants.

The theatre of cripples threatens us as we leave—a man without hands waving his stumps in our faces. It's mainly show, but scary. This is Gandhi's rule under her emergency law. India is without its poor, its cripples—they have been put out of sight. I feel that tricks are being played on me. Can a whole country de-realize itself?

On the fifth, we all fly to Khajrāho, to see the Hindu erotic tombs. On an Indian Airlines jet, I find myself seated beside the Indian ambassador to Saudi Arabia, there hear his estimate of Arabic intelligence and civility. Oddly, I wonder whether he suspects I am Jewish, but I say nothing. I recall the New Year's Day cocktail party at the Canadian High Commissioner's home, where the first guest Ann and I met was a Jordanian. Meeting points.

Arriving at Khajrāho, we find some confusion: there are no return reservations for us. In a shabby back office, Mike and I are told by an Air India pilot, "Your tickets are ninety percent absolutely certain reserved." But I don't know what this really means. Our motel too is far from reassuring—either in cleanliness *or* reservations, but we go off to the temples anyhow.

Once more the mystery of bountifulness in the midst of poverty: the sensual self satiated, all choices given, yielded, the body fully achieved in its desire. Once, I thought, this could mean only de Sade's vision of nature: hooks and whips and eyes. But here it rises like Dante's vision: aspiring shapes, circle over circle, each winding in a staircase toward the sky, itself a metaphor of the soul's and body's union and completeness. And yet, for me—Puritan and Jew (and western Canadian—so Victorian Jew as well), the metaphor is not an easy one, though any prairie boy, interested in centaurs, will admit it or else play Bob Kroetsch's games with it, insisting on inborn rowdiness, macho self, the horseman, the whoresman, the cowboy-boy. I am *unsatisfied.* Is it then the foreign structure I object to (these sensual figures caught in their sensual music, profound abstractions of copulation, their elegant perfectly remote figures involved profoundly in their involutions)? Or is it this culture here seen in its completeness, its structures full, richly ornate as opposed to what I have—I now see—I have said about the prairies: minimal poems, bare bones of self, ghost poems? A deprived country: here (paradoxically) these hungry people, starving, whipped, humiliated, beaten by the canes of Gandhi's police as Britain's police beat them before—and *they* have this vision of paradise in front of them while we have virtually nothing; an absence, as Kroetsch says, from which we make our presences. Or are these temples essentially invisible to them, as so many other structures here are, an invisibility from which to grow both the power and the police? The nihilism, *shunyata*, of Hinduism.

It's not easy to make sense of such intricacy. Is that the point, too intricate to grasp in detail? In the afternoon, we walk through the village, unable to grasp certainties, I say it is like "Clark's village," the name we have given to the eleventh-century ruins at the back of his home in suburban New Delhi. Here there is apparent poverty. We visit a school where rows of children chant a lesson. We become objects of curiosity. The villagers know where we are moving. The children appear suddenly in front of us, giggle and disappear through winding streets. They peer out from hidden corners watching us watching the "elephantiasis man," a man with gigantic testicles, propped up on the walk before him. Once I see a terribly sick or diseased woman. Or is that an illusion? I go dizzy in the hot sun.

On the great Gangetic plain, there is scrub; desert, trees, flowers—sometimes it seems as if there is no one there, no villages. But ninety percent of India is village life, all that huge population invisible. You catch sight of them, almost part of the land itself.

The villagers walk the roads; in green saris, pale blue saris, white dhotis, in bare feet. Women carrying dung patties or sacks of grain on their heads—or water jugs. At the village Jain temple, one spreads out shining red dhal seeds, her black arms shine, her black and gold sari sets off a beautiful strong head, arms, bare feet. She has rings on her toes and fingers, bangles on her wrists.

At night, with the great temple floodlit, we sit in a huge tent and watch folk dancing. African? Arabian dances? Drums and bagpipes. The temples glow under the moon and in the lighting—huge, mysterious—a bad movie. Avoid kitsch. Avoid *mere* effect. Clark says, "texture is all." It is a damnable country; the style overwhelms us.

January 6.

We leave the tourists and drive to a train for Delhi at Jhānsi, Kim's camera-eye alert throughout, her camera working. Mike and Kim argue as to who gets to use the camera. They own two or more, but for some reason have brought only this one on this trip. We stop at Chatarpur, a large town or city; see a monkey-god in a small temple on a small hill; have lunch in a big hotel restaurant. The train station is living India: families seem to live here, conduct business, shop in various ways. A man crouches, hunkers down, beside a barber who shaves him neatly and carefully with a straight razor, a soap bowl nearby, a strap hooked to a pole. Mike, fascinated, watches closely. I think of his barber in *Slaughter*. Who is more in command of style? Mike or the barber? A large train rolls in and we get into a section. India's trains are clearly admirable, but (or—inevitably) we are delayed when the train hits a cow, prompting a theological dispute. I am reminded of village Saskatchewan.

Once the CPR, as Geoff Ursell's song "Empty Stations" reminds us, held village life together. From Hirsch to Estevan is twenty miles, with Bienfait between. Passenger trains used to run regularly along these prairie routes. Great express trains thundered down the Soo Line from Moose Jaw to Minneapolis, stopping at Weyburn and Estevan, with stations between. The highways have changed all that—and the country too. The Jewish ghost towns of Hirsch and Hoffer are not only the product of depression and drought but of urbanization, a new structure of society through its technology. Village India is India too.

An old Sikh sits upright in our section and pretends not to understand our verbal games with which we pass the time. A new station; a young Sikh, wife and baby, come on. We talk about our different worlds. Late, we arrive at the New Delhi station, a stunning sound of crowds. At our hotel again, we order Rosy Pelican beer, sandwiches and chicken; we have our imported and diplomatic whiskey, eat supper. Sid Harrex and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Australian poets, drop by; both are odd mixes of tough-mindedness, gentility, and academic sensibility. Like us? Travellers.

January 8. New Delhi.

The conference blunders on to nowhere—inevitably, it seems, in this invisible country. We have seen the Red Fort, the Great Mosque, the Railway Museum, all of India's imperial history in models, in place—and yet what is it? A morning at the Khan market, bookstores, druggists, photo-shop—the paraphernalia of Indian middle-class marketing and shop-keeping. Later, at Connought Square, we encounter Clark, Bharati, Ranu, the mother of the two women. Clark and I talk, somewhat gingerly, academic plans. He is cautious. I have, in fact, come as an ambassador to urge him to join the York faculty. "This is a real offer," I say, "The Dean instructed me to speak to you." It doesn't sound real on these streets. He is tentative. "How far will they go?" "Try them," I say. "Ask for all you want." Have I gone too far? "No one's opposing?" Tentative again. "No one," I say emphatically. My memory is right, I believe. But I feel shaken. Politics, its means and ways and variety. "I'll think about it," he says.

An endless row of souvenir shops in which we pry through goods, gongs, incense boxes, brasses, onyx figures.

Avoid imitation. Avoid chic.

Later, Ann and I go to Old Delhi, the Great Mosque, Chandi Chowk, teeming streets. It is at once less personal and more objectively concerned than I thought it would be and it is intensely colourful: cottons, shawls, fruits, metals, jewels, bicycles, rickshaws, scooters, ox-carts, horse-carts, jitneys. Here, unlike the villages where we were objects (or subjects) of curiosity, we are scarcely noticed. A lesson in humility. We are not really important. But westerners have difficulty reconciling themselves to that. So much space and room is ours.

How to reconcile the distinctions. Invisible on the streets and at the conference as writers, we go in the evening to Clark's and Bharati's for drinks: presented to celebrities—Sajyit Ray who, immensely tall, towers over me. Dwarfed by this giant film-maker. I seek to regain some confidence in talking to Billy Fish, the comical corporal of *The Man Who Would Be King*, shorter than I, his blonde companion looms over both of us, her breasts embarassingly at my eye-level. I stumble into a side room where a poetry reading is in progress: Mike reads, the young Indian Black Mountain poets read their projective poems: here *Out of Place* sounds wrong, alien, the order non-transferable, the tricks suspect. I don't know who I am or where I am. Why this extraordinary lack of security? Exposed, I become aware of a curious bit of sexual by-play: one couple are together fondling their rather stout companion who offers rude critical comments. The young writers howl. Have great fun. What have I to say to them or to the young intellectuals of India or to anyone?

January 10-11. Jaipur.

We have been living in the Maharajah's "hotel," his palace, the Rambaugh, at Jaipur and visiting such places as the Palace of Winds, a rose-red building structured like an organ to sing in the wind that blows across the desert plains and down from the mountains of Rajahstan. We visit Fatehpur Sikri, the lost or abandoned city of the Moguls who also built the nearby Taj Mahal at Agra. When we saw the Taj, Mike at once said (to the point), "How do they make it float?" (The road to Delhi—from New Delhi to Agra—we see Birney's "Bear" on Delhi Road. "It's smaller than in the poem," someone observes.)

At Amber Palace in the hills above Jaipur, we ride elephants from the lower entrance to the gates higher up. I buy an elephant hook from one of the elephant-boys. Its combined elegance and deadliness attract me: ornately decorated in red, green and stained wood with metal filagree, it is a club of about thirty-six inches, ending in a bronze prod and hook, to guide the elephant. The hook is balanced by reduplicating double sets of elephants, one pair poised above a smaller pair. Their function, beyond balance, proportion, and decoration, is obscure, but it's at once a beautiful and ugly instrument.

At the Rambaugh we stroll through gardens, Mike and Ann for a camel ride. Palaces, royal cities. Our hotel is Victorian, the rooms huge; Ann sings for an hour in the grand tub, enjoying the resonance of the high-ceiling room, the marble, the luxury. We all gather for a beer in our room, Bill and Peggy, Clark, who has now joined the tour, Mike and Kim, Ann and I, aristocratic in our pleasures, lingering over our Rosy Pelican beer. We dine in the great hall.

Bill and I begin our lectures at the University of Rajahstan. Bill is a natural teacher: entertaining, witty, clever. I feel a plodder, uncertain of tone. I think I'm unprepared. But we reassure one another though Clark seems unduly critical. "Don't talk down to them," he says sharply. He seems irritable. I wonder whether we've missed some cultural connection. He gives us some tips: "They have read widely, you know." Yet it is incongruous to lecture to some thirty students, polite and humble though they are, on Canadian literature—here, in the desert of Rajahstan. They are reading for an exam paper but it's even more humiliating to learn that their reading list consists of two poems, one by P.K. Page, one by Irving Layton, and one novel, John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death*. I think of the unpacked boxes of books from the Canada Council at the High Commissioner's offices. A hidden library. The invisible books of Canada: novels, books of poems shipped out of our country to linger in embassy offices—unread there, unread here at home. The presence of our absence. Is this a national character trait, a bureaucratic defense-mechanism, a bungled or misread policy decision, a deliberate political move? Our writers move around the world, but do these ambassadorial moves really work? I've heard that some poets are never actually brought before audiences—in England, in Russia. Was our invisibility at the conference bungling or intentional? Once, four of us (Robin Skelton, Mordecai Richler, Betty Lambert, and myself) were sent to a conference on Canadian studies at a university in Oregon (Corvallis). Apparently, a Second Secretary at the American Embassy chose the wrong place by mistake. Not Eugene but Corvallis. Fewer than thirty students came to hear us (Mordecai had withdrawn, presumably because of a bad back, but maybe he asked, "Where the hell is Corvallis?")

But Rajahstan too offers its paradoxes, like Canada. The university has only recently gained some stability under Gandhi's draconian emerging laws. Wretchedly poor professors, who have been under student seige—locked in for weeks at a time—now are free, to obey the laws of emergency and to endure a dean's inflated account of management, in the crumbling building where it is delivered. We all squirm. Bill and I make a mistake. We invite our academic friends to the hotel for a drink, an embarrassment to them since they cannot afford to pay, yet want to talk to us about book lists, bibliographies. Their modesty and decency shame me.

We have moved to the Clark hotel from the Rambaugh. At the edge of the city, it looks out at the desert, sage, red shale hills, camel carts on dusty roads. It is American, concrete in the wilderness, like the hotel George Jonas writes of in his account of poets reading in Thunder Bay, or the motel in Estevan which Ann and I stayed at in 1974 on my return to Saskatchewan, The Beef-Eater in Estevan. Why do they build these places in India for us? Out there in the village, women hoist dung-patties to their heads; scarved, robed in turquoise, saffron, and green, they make gracious movements. A turn. But they are labourers. I recall paper-makers standing in red tinted water, flapping enormous red layers of paper, blankets being tossed, dye running like blood down their legs. Cottage industries. Two huge red roses in an ornamental jug sit before me on a desk I have seen in Ottawa—or so it seems. Some sort of Muslim star forms a mirror. I look at the desert, ashamed.

January 13. Udaipur to Bombay.

Flight to Bombay is delayed. Clark, Bill, Peggy, and I are to go on. Mike, Kim, Ann finish their trip here. I spend the morning with Clark and Kim in the gardens of the Udaipur Palace, then with Ann. We look out at the (artificial) lake in which this hotel-palace (one of the great hotels of the world, we are told) sits, Venetian, facing the Maharajah's palace on the shore (the stone head of a carved woman incongruously emerging from the water just beyond the dock-landing for water-taxis). We're waiting for our drive to the airport. This is exotic India, an island hotel, glittering with mirrors and ornate corridors, decorated in ponds, and flowers, esoteric plants, glass where once there had been jewels. As our water-taxi pulls away from the scene, I watch Ann turn and walk away along the dock. The moment is unforgettable to me. I can't recall our having said goodbye before in so remote a place.

On the road to the airport, our driver, Mehmoud, discovers with some delight, seeing Mike's picture on *Slaughter* (a copy of which Clark carries), that we are all writers, remarks with joy, "He looks like an Indian movie star." A woman from Washington joins us over tea in the airport. "Rajahstan is booked all winter," says Clark sourly, "It's the groups. We had to sit behind a Swiss wild-life enthusiast all through our last trip. He was always there."

On the flight to Bombay, a propeller plane, I read Clark's manuscript of *Calcutta*, his eyes carefully on me. "Why are you laughing?" he asks. I wish they served drinks, even Peter Scott, an Indian whiskey I've developed a taste for. But there's only a tepid orangeade.

January 14. Bombay.

"All day is kite day," Mr. Birney. Kites flying with razors on their strings to cut down, in kite-fights, opposing kites with razors on their strings. Dead kites hanging from telephone wires all over the city. The universities are closed. Clark, indefatigable, finds a class meeting somewhere and goes off to lecture. Left to my own resources, I timidly venture out near the hotel along the streets of this vast city, find an artisan's market, dully look at souvenirs, carvings, furniture. It's difficult to escape images of London here: double-decker buses, tobacco shops, sweet shops but a "London" devastatingly marked by poisonous contrasts. When we arrived, headlines in the papers at the airport read, "Bootleggers flood city with 1.2 million crone of hootch." Last night, Clark and I snacked on *pakora* in our room in the Taj, dined in a barbecue in the main lodge, talked with an Indian professor who had been travelling with A.D. Hope and with another Australian writer whom Clark knew—their paths following or leading ours on the lecture route. All India a field of wandering poets. The hotel swarms with wealthy Arabs, polished oxfords gleaming below their white robes, knuckle-sized diamonds glittering on their fingers. I feel alone, semite, poor, though that hardly makes sense when I compare the Hilton-style Taj we stay at with the warren outside, just beyond the hotel, past Marine drive. High rises. Land fill. Marsh. The warrens of tin, mud, cardboard. Traffic. Smell. Grit. Wind. Heat. And the slow, quietly heaving water of the Arabian sea, out there beyond the Gates of India—imperial, aloof, the tide red with the blood of the setting sun. Oily. I expect a body to lurch up, or to slop, slop against the shore.

How can this shambles of ten million on the swamp, the seven fingers of Bombay, be held together, given coherence, meaning, except in its very existence? I think of Gandhi, her police, the canes, the elegant rulers of this sinkhole of a country. Suddenly I remember an evening long ago in Edmonton, a large party for two visitors to the University: V.J. Rajan and W.O. Mitchell. Rajan, Brahmin, senior adminstrator for Nehru, scholar—elegant, refined, aloof. Mitchell, prairie-western, raspy, raw as his chewing-tobacco, his sinusy snuffle. Is it their refinement breeds cruelty (Iranian generals, South-American landowners) while our crudity breeds gentleness: the lyricism of *Who Has Seen the Wind* ? Or is the raw/crude paradox simply literary as opposed to *realpolitik*: Marxist, say. Or are the structures deeper still, something Martin Kinch (or George Walker) might write about: desire, anger, inner metaphors about the personal power politics we all play so that unconscious world can exist, not as a metaphor, but as a literal power, the *real* jungle, the *real* Bombay: India, as Mahatma Gandhi seems to have known, *is* the unconscious, forever demanding the absence of ego, hence a threat to Western man and a mystery forever. But the unconscious exists, opposing the conscious self. Dreams and hallucinations are real. *Out of Place* seems so naive, so careful, avoiding risks, compared to this place of ancient tricks and cruelties and truly profound savagery. I begin to glimpse the "order" I hadn't dared to think of—the dream around us, beyond control, beyond structure. Perhaps some ancient Hindu mystic living his dream of nothingness, knows more of this uncontrollable chaos than any Western mind could ever begin to conceive. I remember what the spirits said to Yeats in *A Vision*. "We have no power except to purify our intentions—of complexity." India will be ruled either by meditation *or* brute force and cunning.

After a marvellous tea in the old wing of the hotel, we drive to the airport. Bangalore next.

January 15. Bangalore.

Professor Singh is a neat, small, meticulous man. He drives his new small car, of which he is inordinately proud, with excessive care, much as he might, I expect, mark an essay: with short, neat ticks—15 miles per hour here, stop, 15 miles per hour there, stop. We move slowly, carefully through the neat streets of this modern city. After lunch, our lectures, we have coffee with Professor Singh and his colleagues, all pleased with their club, once an English officers' club. They offer gin and tonic, but we take tea. Singh's university reminds me of University College at the University of Toronto, though the bare-foot servants add a strange note.

Clark seems to know everyone in India. At his cousin-in-law's, a wealthy Bengalese manufacturer, we have cocktails, admire his exceedingly modern upper-middle-class home, its garish paintings, cross the street to join a lively party. It could be one held by York University's younger faculty: a large buffet, western style, drinks, intimate dancing with lights turned down. All kinds of Islamic law being violated here, but are these people Hindu? Later, we finish the evening with drinks at our hotel lounge, as it closes.

January 16. Mysore.

We drive to Mysore, Clark in front with the driver—who is Christian we learn, by the way—Bill, Peggy, and I in the rear. Her cough seems worse. This is "Western," cowboy country; mesas, buttes, stone outcroppings. We're in hill country, enjoying the drive. We come down to wooded land; temples painted in enamelled colours. Now, there are banyan trees, villages in palm-tree settings. We stop at a village toy fair in Kannada. Since the pun is fine, I buy a few tiny toy snake-charmers and "snakes," for Sara. At a bird sanctuary, we see a marvellously ambiguous warning: "Look Out for Crocodiles." Arid trees, and on a stream: egrets, White Ibises, Spoonbills, Paddy Birds, the Indian Pond Heron, Whistling Teal, River Tern, Great Stone Plover, the Eastern Purple Heron. A tree alive with foxbats; another one of those inscrutable Indian notices: "Do not disturb me with your transistor and vociferous voice."

We arrive at Mysore and find ourselves located in a Maharajah's palace, now a hotel, modelled on the Washington White House. It is about five kilometers out of town on the height across from Chandu Hill. In the evening, as we walk to the roof of the White House, to take in the view it offers, a secretive servant follows us, Nixon-like, turning on and off lights at appropriate moments. We are virtually the only guests. The bartender serves only one drink, no matter what we ask for: gin and Honeydew.

January 17, 18. Mysore.

After Clark, Bill and I meet a large class and several professors, we drive back to Bangalore. We see on the way a vast mediaeval scene, the cow market at Mundya. The cattle horns are gaily painted in parti-colours and decorated with ribbons. There are thousands of cattle collected in nearby forests. Later, Peggy observes that it is impossible to see any point of the landscape in which there isn't a human figure. She is right. Clark and I spent yesterday walking along the backroads of the White House lands, talking of families. We drive along now—a cheerful group, at ease. Even Peggy's bad cough is yielding to Clark's ministrations, antibiotics he supplied her. He is teaching us all the patience needed to live in this kind of place, which paradoxically he seems to lack himself and which so sadly I am without.

At the Sri Jayachamara Jandra Art Gallery:

Pure list:
Peacock Chair
clocks
wedding procession of H. H. Krishnarya IV Wadijar
A coloured print and old etching pertaining to Roman Empire
An English party
The Nizam of Hydrabad
Durban of the Nawab of Carnatic
Symphonicum
Music Automator
Clock under Repair
European Doctor

Walter Scott—a lady praying
Ivory Carvings—comb, elephants, pins, gods, goddesses, chess, animals, bullock, elk, deer, monkeys, knives, camels, jade boxes
sandalwood carvings

January 18. Bangalore to Calcutta.

At Bangalore we lunch extravagantly. There is a hotel buffet, tempting us to excess: mutton stew, chicken curry, cold cuts, iced drinks, beer. A little after 2:00, we fly to Madras and Calcutta. It is late and dark, polluted and rainy as we arrive and drive through Dickensian streets in a cab driven by a mean-looking Bengali. Clark's warnings—which he delivered with grim relish (and his writing about this city)—have not lightened my mood. Nor has anything I've read. I take special note of Gandhian signs along the way: *Calcutta. The cultural capital of the nation or a definition of obscenity?* Is that prescience or sensitivity? An attempt at reform or an ironic comment? Our unease—I see Bill and Peggy share my mood—is not lessened when we arrive at the Fairlawn, a little back street hotel which Norman, the Second Secretary at the Canadian Commission, has arranged for us; not the usual grandness we've come to take for granted. He is drinking beer in the open air lobby, waiting for us, presumably assuming we will like the "quietness." But Peggy and Bill take one look at their room and refuse it. Inspecting ours, Clark and I see a huge insect. "*What* is that?" Clark laughs at my alarm; "An Indian cockroach," he says. After some difficulties, we arrange to move to the *Great Eastern*. But when we go over to it, despite further dire predictions from Clark, we see no hooded street forms, no one dying, few, in fact, sleeping on the streets. The military have taken the poor away, just as in New Delhi, to their new "villages," but hardly homes, as I hear from Ann later. "Camps," she tells me. "Sinister, too, and totally inefficient. They can't live there, as they could on the streets."

We drink scotch in my room till 1:30 a.m. Everyone tense, excitable. The enormous city seems to loom over us, in the dark, in the polluted dust.

Calcutta signs:
Rumour Mongers are the nations worst enemies
Gandhi's signs:
The Nation is on the move
Work More Talk Less
Discipline makes a Nation great
Hard Work gives Self Reliance
The Corrupt Will Not Escape Punishment
Calcutta:
Finden's Portraits of the Female Aristocracy of the Court of Queen Victoria, 1849

January 19. Calcutta.

Evening. Bill and I are interviewed by Shankar Lal Bhattacharya, a youthful journalist from *The Hindustani Sunday Times.* He wears a dhoti far more elegant than I had imagined would be likely, white linen, silk brocade and lace, black panelled lapels. Like many Bengalis, his speech too is elegant, and with a trace of a lisp. The interview takes an international turn when Shankar picks up an allusion to Borges and is pretentiously mistaken in his account of doubles. We have difficulty restraining laughter. What this will sound like in print, I can't imagine.

Later, we dine at the Amber Café with some local artists whom Clark knows—film-makers and painters, wealthy cigar-smoking men, beautiful women. Bill is not well and returns to the hotel. At dinner, I talk with Paritosh Sen, an artist and writer. He tells me of his verse memoirs that he is working on, some sort of Bengali form. Its central image is a tree in which his family lives, everything to be linked together by the branches that form verse lines. At the centre is the story of his mother's death, an omen linked to a mongoose. "Is it an allegory?" I ask. "Everything is an allegory," he replies, "but my mother appeared to me in a vision warning me to return home, and I got there moments before her death, and before the mongoose killed a serpent." He diagrams, with skilled hands—a tree, a deadly rodent, a dead mother. "How do I live here? How do you?" I ask him. "Everything is linked to everything else," he says, "Remember Forster: 'only connect'." The body of India: it seems clear to me for a moment at least. The tree. The unconscious. All that unavailable mystery. An artist's words. The evening dissolves.

Today in Calcutta, driving with Clark to the Victoria Museum and through streets that so remind me of Kensington, I think I am at last content, resolved. But puzzles remain. Whatever poverty there had been, ghastly and deadly, has been swept out of sight by Gandhi, Nehru's daughter. What remains is the worst or virtually the worst of nineteenth-century London. Bad enough. But how has it all been done? How do you make a city invisible? We prowl through antique stores, admire a gigantic ebony armoire that came here from the East Indies. It would cost a fortune to buy. Think of the story in how it came here, from some rich merchant's home to this store.

We lecture and read at the University of Jadhavur. I feel at ease, believe all goes well. One student comes up to me and asks me to autograph a copy of my book. "Where in the world did you get that?" I ask. "In Vancouver," he says, "I studied there with Professor New." Bill talks of Lowry, his signs, his mountains.

January 20. Calcutta.

Breakfast with Bill, who has recovered from his evening illness, Norman, Clark and Peggy. Paritosh phones and asks us to visit his studio at the University. He shows us paintings, including his own, in modern post-expressionist style. He presents us with copies of a book on his work. We look at drawings and I buy one because it has Ann's name in its design, a coincidental pattern of abstraction but Paritosh too believes in synchronicity. He brings out the scroll of his memoir. It is hand-done in an elaborate Bengali script in which letters turn into illustrations: a lovely thing. We leave for the airport to take our flight to Delhi.

We wait for our flight which is, expectedly, late. We have become accustomed to this. Air India flies a circle route around India and, as Clark, wise in Indian ways, has warned us, since it begins in the north end and is successively later at each stop on the way, at Calcutta, the penultimate flight, one can expect the worst. As delay succeeds delay, tempers begin to rise, surprisingly mostly amongst the Indian passengers. But we show the strain too. At dinner, to be paid for by tokens given to us by the airline, we find ourselves in a stupid argument over the illogical position taken by the manager who will not allow us to add cash to the tokens for a large dinner. We know we can never win such a dispute, but Bill suddenly gets stubborn and tries. He loses. We grumble through dinner. Hours pass. I listen to the dispatcher calling flights: Tehran. Moscow. Bangkok. Hong Kong. Tokyo. Ozawa. I sleep fitfully on an airport bench.

Someone approaches and notes the painting I carry. "Is that Paritosh? Very good. Very good," he says and wishes me luck. Given and gifted, I am alone in the airport, suddenly desolate. "No lines connect," someone says, "There's no flight from here." Why can't I care, so that I will understand that it matters that a man harnessed in iron like a horse—a rickshaw man—pulls other men beside our waiting 707.

By 1:00 a.m. we are moved to our airport hotel to spend the remaining hours of the night—Hilton style. Clark breaks out his diplomatic Scotch and we drink Johnny Walker Red Label until we are ready to sleep.

January 24. Delhi.

Leaving India. I spend days variously: at Claridges, roaming about town to Connought, the Lodi Tombs, visiting with Clark, Bharati, and Ranu, eating at a Chinese restaurant with Clark and his two bright beautiful sons. Ranu returns to Gujarat, Bharati goes off to work on a film with Satyajit Ray. I say goodbye to Peggy and Bill at lunch at the hotel. Over gin and lime, we recall and retell our versions of the trip. Experienced travellers now, we laugh at our earlier innocence. I can't escape my loneliness despite the good friends I am with. I phone home to discover Evie has returned from South America, call again later to talk with Ann. I prowl the streets, decide to spend one night at the Ashoka, but after taking a cab over, I am appalled by its Western chic. A woman sings with a group, skilled, slick North American. A double Johnny Walker Black Label costs me fifty rupees. This final contact with India is a disappointment.

After a drive in heavy rain to the airport, through customs, to the 747, and a fifty minute delay. Tehran. More delays. It becomes unlikely I'll be able to connect at Frankfurt for London. We pass formidable mountains, the Anatolian plain, Ararat is visible. The Austrian Alps—England spreading out from the Channel. History.

Europe. I think of Paritosh's last words to me. "Everything is linked to everything else. Only connect."

I talk with my seat partner, a young Indian chemical engineer, now an investment analyst in the U.S.A. An Indian student, in Business Administration, from Madison Wisconsin, joins us along with a professor of communications from Stanford who has just finished a lecture tour of India for the State Department, like mine for External Affairs. He drops names, beginning a contest: the Film Board, Hugo MacPherson, theorists, McLuhan, Theal (not bad). I respond with fiction writers, Blaise (take that), poets, Ondaatje (and that), critics, Jim Beveridge. He flounders over Margaret (the last name unsaid, he abruptly leaves).

What have we learned? At New York I scramble for the last connection of the night for Toronto. Make it. It is snowing but in the soft wet flakes we take off and head for home in the dark, in the wet night.

JOURNAL
FORT SAN: BEGINNINGS
1977

July. Regina—Fort San.

I arrive at the Regina airport a day ahead of my scheduled arrival at Fort San to realize it's a mistake. No one here to meet me. Several phone calls later, I've got Pat Krause at her lake cottage, the indispensable cheerful Pat, and help will be on the way to drive me out to the Saskatchewan School of the Arts where I'll teach a two week seminar on poetry, then to Banff for a three week session. When was it last that I visited Regina? In '75, on my way to the Sask Writers Guild meeting where Kroetsch, Ken Mitchell, Geoff and Barb Ursell convinced me I should teach at the school? The energy out here: from Mitchell's organizing power, Kroetsch's conviction and passion for prairie voices, the Ursells' work and skill—and a dozen other young writers, Robert Currie, grizzled and thoughtful, Hyland, perennial humourist, Sorestad and more. Now I sit in the airport lounge waiting for my ride. Drink vodka and tomato juice. Wonder how I belong here—a false claim? Later, as I drive to Fort Qu'appelle and Fort San I think, it's a physiological thing, the prairies. We fit spaces as our brain fits the world, the language mediates. It's not a question of whether one is horizontal man or vertical man but of the way your mind fits. You can feel it. For some reason these colours, these abstractions, these fields mean "home" to me and I can feel it in a gathering sense of words. *Out of Place* meant a great deal to me. What new words are here? I think of it as a kind of epistemological sense (whatever that means), a sort of sense of knowledge here, or knowing of how knowing works here, I suppose. It's as if words themselves (not Suknaski's stories or Kroetsch's, but my own) get supercharged.

As we drive into the old San, its main building huddled in the soft, pale green of the valley-folds beside the algae-thickened lake, I try to fight against an unnamed depression. I am taken to my room in a sort of barrack hut, there's a green covered bed, a kind of plywood dresser and mirror, a closet, a table. Stark enough, I grumble, thinking no doubt of the chalets at Banff, their cottage-style furnishings, rugs, bathroom, and view to the mountains. Some prowling reveals a porch or sun-room with evidence of writers' work. "Where the hell is everyone?" I think and at once run into two attractive women. We seem to have met since I greet one, sharp and green-eyed, with a kiss. She is Byrna Barclay, the other Anne Campbell; we sit on the beds and chairs of Byrna's room soon deep in exchanges of occult secrets, Byrna with her gift of second sight hands-down winner in tale-spinning. I don't know it then but I have made friends, I have begun my work at Fort San, and the first poems, which I'll write for this book, "Prologue," "Machu Picchu," "Parting at the Lake Palace," and "Hermes," are in my head, to be put together in the next two weeks. Beginnings.

JOURNAL
EUROPE:
PLAGUE CEMETERY
1978

May 27-28. London.

In London at Gatwick about 10:30 a.m., London time. Two of our packs are missing. We see Margaret Visser, a colleague in the Division of Humanities at York, paler than usual—she has lost a year and a half of her thesis notes of her brilliant academic work in classics. But it turns out to be a false alarm all around, misplaced baggage. We get on the wrong bus to the Post House and have to retrace our steps. Sara mopes on the train to Victoria, obviously coming down with something. A usual arrival. Still, in the warm spring day we go down Oxford to Piccadilly and Trafalgar, Westminster. Ritualizing our return to England.

Reading Doug Jones's *Under the Thunder*, though his re-run through the garden-wilderness worries me, especially reading it in England. Sensibility is fine, but does the myth serve to solve any technical problems of modern painting or writing? Bunyan's words in my head, "As I walk through the wilderness of the world." Or should that read "of *this* world"? At Fort San, working through the first poems of *Blood Lines* (working title) thoughts of Banff kept recurring: find a structure. Or not *so* insistent and demanding: a question—what *is* the structure? Not self. Not *setting* in the simple-minded sense of place. But *lines* between, among, beginnings, endings. Lines to. Something Sagan once said, about the anatomy of the brain being the mind, remains with me. As if one's neurology determined the actual existence of the world (or the identity of knowledge and essence): you are what you know. *It* is what you know. So, I think of these trips as structural features, not experience but lines. London connecting me with its history.

June 7. Caen.

A new sense of Norman France. We have come here with the rough idea to travel the coasts of this part of Europe, France through Normandy and Brittany, inland to the Dordogne, to Barcelona and North to San Sebastian, along to Galicia, down to Portugal to the Algarve. Wandering. Here we look at Gothic cathedrals, towns rebuilt after the war, touching places I knew in other times. The doubleness of time affects me: Rouen, Caen, Bayeux, Liseux, Deauville, Trouville. On June 6, we go to the beaches. At Arromanche, an ancient unbearable wound is touched. At a café in Caen, a Canadian, like ourselves, visiting the beaches, talks to us. Old time returns. The cathedral at Bayeux and the Norman tapestry. I saw it thirty-four years ago and, driven stupid by war, didn't know what I was looking at, unaware of our own history. Canadian brutality once before tells me now who we were and what I was. On the little quick trains that take us here and there, I begin to smell history. In Deauville and Trouville, on impressionist beaches, I watch Sara and listen to her quick, eager, longing voice and aspiration. I am taken by mystery. The little girl at Omaha Beach among the dunes of death and wandering by the military graves. Jewish stars of David. At night in the hotel, reading *Falconer*, Cheever's tale of cheating, lying, prisons. How does one find out one's life has been led in addiction, lies, that the world is its own prison? The physiology of the brain. Now we are about to go along the coast of Brittany, the light changing and subdued. We move into the mystery.

June 8. Rouen.

At Rouen, we find a plague cemetery and visit it at dusk. The ill-tempered keeper lets us in after we pound hard on the gate. Place of skulls. Every part of the small square marked out as death's place. The square at twilight arouses in me a sense of uneasiness. I think I see the dark keeper peering at us out of corners There are odd angular figures hanging from doors, like puppets on the wire frames we use to make hanging men in certain games. Today (copying this out in June, 1980) I enter this note from Sagan: *Broca's Brain.*

> Cannibals in northwestern New Guinea employ stacked skulls for doorposts, and sometimes for lintels. Perhaps these are the most convenient building materials available, but the architects cannot be entirely unaware of the terror that their constructions evoke in unsuspecting passers-by. Skulls have been used by Hitler's SS, Hell's Angels, shamans, pirates, and even those who label bottles of iodine, in a conscious effort to elicit terror. It makes perfectly good sense. If I find myself in a room filled with skulls, it is likely that there is someone nearby, perhaps a pack of hyenas, perhaps some gaunt and dedicated decapitator, whose occupation or hobby it is to collect skulls. Finding yourself in a roomful of brains is still more horrible, as if some unspeakable moral monster, armed with ghastly blades and scraping tools were shuffling and drooling somewhere in the attics of the Musée d'Homme.

Some would have it the body remembers. But the head remembers the way the body does, with its anatomy. The shape of its neurons.

June 9. Avranches.

Sara's birthday. We leave Avranches by train for Mont-Saint-Michel and meet four young American students, Morehead scholars from North Carolina University. Bob Cluett of York, friend, poet, and exceedingly witty scholar, is a Board Member of the Foundation. The four are on plans, related to military purposes, for touring Europe on scholarships. One will trace out Patton's movements through Europe from this town which served him as the launching point for his great sweeping assault across the continent. The key to Brittany, Patton said. And Brittany would unlock Nazi France. Why? A matter of logistics? Terrain? What is Brittany? Rennes is one of the great civilized cities of France with splendid gardens. It is also the place deemed safe enough (that is, sufficiently anti-semitic) to hold Dreyfuss's appeal trial. I think of Doug's *gardens*, Canadian retreats.

Avranches
Young young men on beaches die. Patton schemes
all of Europe open to his myths of rule—
how to say a Norman Pine leans against a hill

new gasoline burns beside restored arches out
where Brittany's most famous hill takes the
tide this evening as it has for centuries

look at the dead
for Union, Colony
ancient forum

for the Union dead

Avranches
Young men die on beaches, the
General schemes Europe open to
his myths of law
a Norman pine leans against a hill

in Europe's streets new cars
beside restored arches where
Britanny's most famous hill takes
the tide this evening as it has
for centuries.

look look at the dead
for Union, Colony
for ancient forums

for the Union Dead

On the way back to our inn in the evening, having returned from Mont-Saint-Michel, Ann notices a caravan of gypsies, the ulcered foot of one boy, a flurry of clothes as if bodies are being covered. American generals slept in caravans in their rush across these woods and hills.

June 10. To Dinan.

From Rennes to St. Malo by car. A beautiful coast. Surprisingly Mediterranean today, in its colours and contours. We drive along the headlands and capes of the great St. Malo region, noting that in cafés we pass at noon surprisingly large numbers of seashell (oyster) meals are being served to tourists, despite the summer oil-spill catastrophe. At Dol-de-Bretagne we come on a Dol mound for the first time; a granite heap from neolithic times and here too a Christian story. We picnic on the hill and pace out the tale of Satan and Michael. A great struggle of giant forms leaping from island to island, from the Dol Mound to Mont-Saint-Michel, itself visible all along the coast. Its potency becomes clear. We've moved from history to myth in one bound. Was that the potency Patton saw? There were seaport battles along this coast in WW II, at St. Malo in particular. We see the first of many menhirs along this coast. Strange monuments or markers out of Druidic times.

June 12. Sable d'Or des Pins to Quimper.

Travelling the Emerald Coast and across Brittany by car from St. Brieuc to Quimper. A marvellously Celtic country as we see in the Breton Museum of Folklore in Quimper. Filled with mystic lore through name and place, the oddity of France as a Welsh or Scottish place. But the Celtic separatist sentiment is evident, as we see in a graffiti sign which we mistranslate: "Liberté Pour le Croissant," we take to mean "Free the Bread Roll." In Quimper, from our hotel room we look out at a pastoral scene, church spire, old Breton houses, hill and green trees. I can't place myself. The day stays with me, its resonance with *Lord of the Rings* oddly there (we don't know yet what ruined towers, grottos, caves, castles, mountains we will look at with wonder). Whatever it is that rings is in the language, in the landscape, although the town is really provincial French and the scenes remotely cubist. Ann talks of Cezanne as a forefather of cubism and says she understands, looking at a view like this, how that came about. The scenes dissolving into paintings, mythic tales, structures.

June 13. To Concarneau.

A day along the great Finistère coast—at Pointe du Raz, the Bay of Desolation, Pointe du Van and the bird sanctuary of the Cape itself. Sights of saw-toothed coast and cliffs and vast capes looking out the Atlantic. Drive to Concarneau, a small fishing village by the coast, old city. We drive each day, and picnic by the car: tomatoes, sweet peaches, thick white bread, creamy cheese: Gruyère, Brie, a yellow whose name we never learn, ice cold mineral water, sometimes tuna fish, sometimes pâté.

Mineral Waters:
  Evian
  Vittel
  Vichy
  Perrier
  Fontaneda

Ice Creams:
  Miko
  Camy
  Frigo
  Arvidesa
  Cortijo

And Dinners:
  Salade Niçoise or
  Trout or
  Grilled or Barbecued Chiken (Poulet Rôti) or
  Green Salad or
  Steamed Mussels or Mussels in White Wine
  Pommes Frites
  Table Wine—anything going, often a litre

We stay at hotels near the railroad, or at the center of town, old, cheap, middle range or lower, usually with a bath (or one down the hall): Hôtel de l'Univers; Hôtel de France; Hôtel Stella Maria; Hôtel Normandie; Hôtel La Caravella; Hôtel des Pins; Hôtel de Commerce—44 to 50 F for the three of us. I have a phobia about fire, refuse rooms on third or fourth floors, look for ways out on the second, and never find it, though I usually console myself by judging whether or not a leap out of the window means only a broken leg—at worst. We stroll along beaches, river banks, to churches and *points de vue*. Drink coffee and brandy in the hotel bar at night.

June 14. Brittany.

The Cape du Rey and Bay of Trespasses: where the dead floated in. The Druids took their own dead to an island nearby. A poem of the tidal race and sorrow to all men. The Parish of Penmarch where the pirate La Fontenalle raged, killing thousands it is said, cannibalizing some. And now to a beach town surrounded by records of people of "primitive" times whose Druidic and astrological and funereal ruins are all about us. Patterns. From "early" man to Neolithic to Cro-Magnon to Nazi and American, from rocks to caves. Patterns. From pirate to Nazi to American gunman. The patterns continue.

June 15 to 19. From Carnac to Nantes to Bordeaux.

We drive from Carnac down the narrow isthmus to Quiberon with the Côte Sauvage on our right. Truly dramatic places. The tables, dolmens, alignments at Carnac provide astonishing displays of neolithic Stonehenge structures. Thousands of menhirs lined in rows pointing out some prehistoric astrological or astronomical observations. Like the Incas in the high Andes, these people too must have looked at the stars in wonder or at the sun being swallowed up by the dark bird of winter and, in mystery and awe, must have put down in the language of stone a record of their observations: a poem to the return of light, to the rebirth of corn. The structure of their minds can still be observed. It is written in the land and, as we will soon see, under the land too.

The Côte Sauvage is indeed a savage place, made more interesting to us by Sara's quick discovery of German World War II fortifications all along the coastline and by the dramatic appearance, unexpectedly, of a castle or a fort or a line of bunkers. So many of Brittany's ports have been battlefields. Submarine pens of Nazi Germany. Areas crucial to the Battle of the Atlantic and so targets of Allied bombing runs. A history of strife. Belle Isle is just off shore, a part of Canadian history not much spoken of. It occurs to me how very little of our interesting betrayals we ever write about, only our uninteresting loyalties. At Quiberon we watch a little tug or ferry from Belle Isle labouring in heavy seas. Suddenly, without any reason, I think these are good times, the sea raging about, ourselves travellers neither here nor there. I feel no loyalties, no commitments to this place, that history, these people—only to language and to the strangeness of *now:* the wind in my face, the sound of the sea, its gravelling roar as it slides back and charges, the intensity of sunlight, wind-whipped clouds, and around us megaliths, Stone Age monuments, an incredibly fine style, design of the most elaborate sort. An odd surge of ecstasy amid the ruins of time and the lost languages of stone. As at Wood Mountain, the prairie wind breathing across us, the sunlight on sandstone, the undecipherable petroglyphs—or for that matter at Roche-Percée near Estevan, by the hoodoos.

June 19. Bordeaux.

Sara reminds us that today is Charles's birthday. He is a long way apart from us. Mail arrives with a moving letter from Esther Hoffer, now living in Weyburn. She is reading *Out of Place* and says she finds Ann's photos particularly affecting because they are of the fields and corners she knew as a girl. Recalling the family, her father. She raises questions about why we remember as we do, and *what* to remember. For the Jew, memory is a sacred duty. She includes the sinister comment that her father's last words to her about leaving the farm were that perhaps he had been wrong to have helped save European Jews by bringing them west to the land for now they face the same threat in this country as they once did in Europe. If she is prophetic, these are terrrible words. Sad anyhow. But she ends by reminding me that when she was a young girl she lived in our house in Estevan. Like many Jewish girls from the farms when it came time for her to do her senior matric, she had to study in a collegiate and to do so had to find a Jewish home in which to live. Crossing lines: I am in France in 1978 reading of Estevan in the late twenties—of Henry Mandel, of Jakie (dead in Normandy in WW II), of Gerty, my favourite cousin, of Beulah Krivel, who died young, or Saul, Barney, and Mickey, the other Krivels who once sang and played. The Jews of Estevan. In Bordeaux, in a small university café, we meet and talk with the owner, a young Scotsman from Glasgow who phones his mother weekly. Visit a superb still life exhibition of paintings from Breughel to Soutine. Leave with new rented car for Périgueux past Bordeaux vineyards.

June 20. Périgueux.

According to the *Companion Guide to South-West France* by Richard Barker, the specialty of the Dordogne is a liqueur, *Crème de Noix*, "unspeakably revolting." Does this say anything about Pound? If pigs are needed to root out truffles, what aids must the poet find to discover poems? Who dreams our past? "It is a failure that a novel should be taken as an autobiography," says a writer on the BBC (who is French-Canadian, though New England background and voice) and who talks about "Red Indians" in a most peculiarly unconvincing way.

Following dinner, walking through town we realize our hotel is at the edge of old Périgord, its mediaeval and renaissance houses and buildings.

June 21. Périgueux.

Thinking of Pound, his confused version of history, his impure language, mixed and this town: jumbled, modern, mediaeval, renaissance, the Renaults, Peugots, Citröens, squealing, snorting, jolting up and down narrow streets, their clatter reinforcing the complication of time lines, I find myself in the Périgord Museum looking at a portrait and a stuffed figure in a diorama: Chief Rain-in-the-Face, Sioux Chief, one of Custer's main enemies, amid a clutter of prehistoric people—bushmen, neolithic men, skeletons that a past rejected. He stares out of the 1880s in America and Canada alongside two or more millennia of Europe's past, the grief of ages on his dark face touching this darkness as if we had never known the meaning of time in Western America. Custer, the imperialist soldier, at the edge of Canada.

Rewriting Musée de Périgord

The Sioux say powerful magic
language of the plains
language of the mountains
to the bluecoats, Americans
gold-haired Custer

And say magic
to Scotsmen: dour, northern
men of steel and coin
grandmother's men

Magicmen, the Sioux
Rain-in-the-Face killed a Cheyenne
before he was ten years old.
Big Bear saw hanging men
on the plains, the river people

And Pound thought business really mattered
the most terrible decision
his life would be paid upon

In Périgord new Renaults
line the streets where business
really matters and makes noise

June 24. Saint-Céré.

The caves of Rouffignac, Padirac, Presque. Ann sends a postcard to Bob Kroetsch telling him of the womb-like inter-uterine bliss of the caves, their folded, dripping surfaces, sleek and wet. As we get into boats to travel the underground rivers of the caverns of Padirac, she talks of the boatmen in the oddly gondola-like craft as "cheerful Charons." We ride the collapsed time of the mythic primitive caves (new space) to look at paleolithic drawings (men lying on their backs in narrow dark spaces lit by flickering torches compelled to sketch out rapidly, and with sharp precision, animal shapes). In science fiction settings of stalactites and stalagmites, futuristic worlds flicker into existence, the inner cave-world reflecting on the history of religious wars and the centuries of battle in the outer world, itself filled with chasms, gorges, towers, castles: Castlenau, Rocamadour, Montal. One day, we count seven castles in sight of each other. There are seven towers of Merle for seven brothers.

Re-reading Ortega Y Gasset: and what is it that changes style? To have seen for the first time paleolithic art? To look at the petroglyphs of Wood Mountain? To be born in sight of the hoodoos of Roche-Percée? Sagan tells us of our reptile brain, deepest and sleepiest of our three brains, waking only at night; slowly out of deep sleep it dreams its ancient shapes and savage times. Caves? Monsters? The cannibals in the dungeons of Merle?

June 27. Montauban.

One month travelling. We come down from the north, from Argentat, Sarlat, Cahors, heading for Toulouse. Caves, crags, fortresses, river valleys, gorges. The doors of Souilliac and Moissac, the dancing prophet, Isaiah, at Souillac and the mournful young Jeremiah at Moissac belong with a remarkable set of iconographic designs of doors and cloisters.

The North Door at Moissac: St. Pierre

The way it was done: artisans
carrying an iconography of Spain
the eastern sense Moors brought

Christ as egg and Lord
down French roads dusty with
limestone stirring in their nostrils
Abbots instructing workmen, teams
lintels, gods, and   to carve

Jeremiah: the Northern Door

I see him, young, American, alone
hiking French roads
tired now, recalling the last ride
the time known, the roads ahead

A poem of doors and icons. A hot hot day at Souillac, we wait until the church door will open, prowl the town for a laundromat, find most shops as closed as those in Spain during the noon hour. Sara, Ann and I walk the streets, Canadians looking for a laundry or a church—in the heat.

June 29. Carcassonne.

A marvellous grand-style old and very cheap hotel, a huge courtyard opening off our room which is rebuilt but echoes some faded grandeur in its fireplace, mirror, and high, high ceilings with fine wall-plaster mouldings. Across the courtyard some sort of ex-ballroom with old art-deco coloured rose glass, the whole smelling of decayed dignity of stone, plaster, and glass of the thirties still touched up by the vine lattices of the courtyard and the strong, if crumbling, stone walls. A place for sadness, ghosts of brides. I think about desire, aspiration, hope, its mystery. What aim, what intent, what satisfaction? The meeting with the deepest unknown questions of one's life. Once I thought they would appear in the figures of art, figures of history, patterns. But everything glances off everything else. The large patterns shatter, the personal deflects from its centrality. Ego becomes the history of them all. What shall I do? How shall I live? The questions are their own kinds of grief. Who is free of his past? And how far back does that really go? We have come to a border: France/Spain. The border between past and present, there and here, this place that time. Who knows the right tense?

July 5. Barcelona.

Colour, noise, boisterousness. Perhaps best seen in the Picasso exhibition here, especially in his variations on *Las Meninas*, a brilliant exercise, I think on the question of space: the poetics of space or maybe the mathematics of space, the space of space. Not so much as in Bob Kroetsch's marvellously playful version of the sexuality of space, his horse-house Western joke-metaphor, as in the idea of space, especially in space as thought of by Velásquez (where *is* the artist, where *is* the painting?) and now re-thought by Picasso. Picasso gives it all at once, a sense of being crowded, closed in, let out, distorted, all a problem of perception and structure and certainly that is where Barcelona is. Vast, crowded, jostling, urgent musical city with its shapes and dizzying heights. We're on the top reaches of the melting architecture that is Sagrada Familia, Gaudi's unfinished masterpiece, at the point where we hit vertigo and Barcelona begins to spin below us. I think of the Ramblas, the Paseo, American sailors, Chinatown, the Jewish Hill, Montjuich, over the city, Columbus on his pillar pointing to the Atlantic and the New World, the red tile of Catalonian roofs, the Plaza Real where we stay, its buff and tawny colours, palm-lined courtyard and arcades, its Sunday collection of stamp collectors at the gigantic Philatelist Market.

July 9. Burgos.

We've come up from Barcelona by train, the Talgo, first to Zaragosa which turns out to be so crowded we end up, to Sara's pleasure, in a first class hotel. Four stars or five to please her. Our aim is usually one at best or an H (for pension) or P. A windy town on the great and very dramatic plains of Central Spain with mountains off in the distance. Red, yellow landscape, Western. We take a car and drive to Lagroña across an even more dramatic landscape, stark, abrupt, and then to Burgos itself, a rose-red city half as old as time, dominated by a large cathedral, but with a very pretty atmosphere, especially on the banks of its river by the graceful Paseo. The landscape takes my imagination, as at home. We stay in *centre ville* at Hotel España at the corner of the Paseo and not far from a bridge fronted by El Cid's statue, Spanish expressionist. A day at the Miraflores Carthusian Monastery walking through quiet woods and across Quixote-like plains with views of the red town of Burgos below on the heights. A head full of poems. Ways to structure *Blood Lines* flood through me in this quiet space: one section on "Chamber of Horrors," a second on "Landscape," a third on "Politics." I let the landscape soak in: plains, colours, bridges, buildings, woods. At the hotel, there's mail: a letter from Purdy suggesting an edition of his critical works and essays with an introduction from me, along with some of his sharp comments on Doug Jones's attitude to art (re *Under the Thunder*). Cooley and Enright, the Manitoba force (along with Arnason) in *Turnstone*, indicate interest in *Blood Lines* and will use an interview, plus the *Prologue* published in *Salt*, plus an article on my work by Stevens in the ECW prairie issue edited by Cooley. A request too for an article on Atwood's poetry for a critical book. Busy times. We go north to the coast tomorrow.

July 11. San Sebastián.

Something has gone wrong at Pamplona. At the running of the bulls, two young Basques have been shot. There have been riots, general strikes. At Tolosa, just as we arrive, we see a group of young men hauling a heavy tree across the road. "A problem with the trucks," I say. But that's not it. A boy says something to us about the death at Pamplona (*las muertes*—the dead). This is a barricade. We haven't fully got the implications and so turn back, figuring there's a back road to San Sebastián. Through winding mountain ways we come out on the *auto-pista* and roll into town about 5:00 p.m., somewhat exultant as we realize our hotel, the Codina, is directly in front of us. When we walk in to register, we feel the tension at once. We're told by an English-speaking guide, standing near a worried looking tour group at the desk, to stay away from the centre of town; everything—banks, restaurants, bars, stores—has been closed. The hotel can serve as a locus. It will provide meals, on *pension*, and its bar is open. We go to park our car, warned to put it in an inconspicuous place. On the street, it's a target. We realize a barricade is going in place down the road we have just entered. Ann stops to photograph the scene, a bit excited by the unusual action, while Sara, worried, plucks at her skirt, warning her not to. As we turn to go back to the hotel, a white car screeches to a halt beside us and two obviously angry men—Basques—burst out demanding in threatening tones and gestures to know what is going on, why are we photographing them? Ann, who knows Spanish well, mutters in apparent incomprehension something about an interesting situation. "Interesting! Interesting," the taller of the two shouts, "It's a matter of patriotism. It's a political act. We ought to smash your camera." The camera. Our role comes into focus. We are voyeurs. Skimming surfaces. We have seen, but not touched these lives. The young man means it, moves toward Ann. Cool as always, she says words to the effect that she doesn't understand. We walk away. The two men turn back in disgust, drive off.

Ann suddenly realizes she has dropped her gold watch and searches for it in despair, a high school graduating gift from her parents. The focus has shifted again.

At the hotel, we're led to know that there is a real problem here. The situation is at flash-point. Tense and uneasy, we sip drinks in the bar. We have no means of knowing what this will come to. We talk with the guide, who is Irish. "But the Irish are smart," he says, "The Basques have a low intelligence. You can tell it by their faces." He has an English group and a problem with them, what to do tonight and tomorrow. "Give them lots to drink and a party tonight, but what then?" He worries.

I remember riot scenes I have known: Estevan in 1932, Regina when the South Saskatchewan Regiment went on the rampage against the Germans in Regina in early WWII and my Uncle Ike, the Colonel of the Regiment, bringing the men into order, riding a truck down 11th Avenue and ordering them to their places through a bull horn. We sit in the bar. There are little gusts and bursts of rumour. In the town there is a riot, one man at least dead. Smoke billows from burning tires at the barricade. But oddly, it remains quiet here and at length we go out, stroll along the beaches in the calm evening, the Bay waters running softly out with the tide.

At breakfast, it is clear the barricade will be lifted. We take the *auto-pista* out of town at high speed and do not stop till we're past Bilbao. Not until we're out of the Basque country does Sara breathe easily. "But we're on their side," we tell her. She is not convinced.

July 15, 1978. San Vicente de la Barquera.

Now as we drive along the coast we understand the obvious: the regional nature of Spain. Catalonian in Barcelona, Basque in the North East, and here Asturian. In this pretty fishing village, we stroll out in the evening for *tapas*—wine and snacks of *tortillas*, *bocadillos*, squid, octopus, or fried chips. At night we eat on fisherman's walk (the main street): salad, fish, *langostinos* (a treat for Sara). There is dancing and song. A festival. "Spanish songs?" Ann asks. "No," says a visitor from the next village anxious to tell us of his place, "The songs tell of the sea and the land and the hills. They are Asturian." We watch the dancing. We listen. Young people singing. We are moved to think of our distant home, the plains of the West. Our songs.

The Thunder Creek Co-Op
The Trouble is Wheat
What a Time We Have

Good Times on the Prairies
Otto Lang
That's Why We Fought for the Pool
Easy Money
Empty Stations
Just a Tear Drop in My Heart
Earth, Sunlight, Water
The Bright Red Geranium Waltz
Spring on the Prairie
A Gopher in the Sky
Saskatchewan, Mighty River

July 21. Santiago de Compostela.

Along the coast we pass rougher hills, granite outcroppings, a grey sea. *Hórreos* everywhere, stone corn cribs like miniature churches. Santiago is a beautiful city, its main square marked off by a graceful cathedral and intricately beautiful palace. Like all those arriving, we go to the cathedral pillar to rest our palm on the palm print worn by centuries of touching. This sacred place: where St. James was washed ashore in his stone coffin, so the legend goes, wondrous fisherman, his sign a scallop shell, he made this a shrine for pilgrimages of Europe. Even the Wife of Bath was here, Chaucer tells us. Past fine mediaeval arcades, we find our hotel. In town we hear, nightly, bagpipers and dancers. We find the statue of Rosalie Castro, Galicia's national poet, a firm, beautiful woman whom I love at once. The town is festive because of the approaching holiday, St. James's day.

July 25. Vigo.

St. James's day. Have we now come to the end of a pilgrimage, knowing place, or only another illusion? There's a stir at the railroad station as we wait to depart for Portugal. Other trains pull up for Santiago, with flags, ribbons, singing crowds. We hear Galician songs, the "International." Soon we cross another border.

August 10. Ôlbos d' Água, the Algarve.

"Custom makes monsters familiar." I write this on the Algarve, the hot reddish coastline of Southern Portugal, a crowded resort area. In a poor country. We have an apartment by the beach. I have learned nothing more about monsters, but I believe what Alfonso Neajes says in "Major Arandas Hand," *The Eye of the Heart.* To come here we followed a road that took us to Porto and its slums, as poor as those of Lima, to Coimbra, its university, one of the oldest in Europe, to Évora, a Roman town that sits on plains like those of the West, with its Chapel of Bones, the dead. All ways are strange and familiar. The sea beats on, tidal, rhythmic—coast upon coast upon coast.

JOURNAL
GOING HOME: REGINA
1979

March. Regina.

I've come here to write a book. As writer-in-residence in a library. When did I begin writing this story? Here, in Regina, books around me, the library that contains the library. And outside, the plains, and myself looking at myself walking past the house in which I lived/live. Andy Suknaski brings a poem to my apartment, "Betrayal Beginning in Dreams."

We are writing each other's poems.
Dark Ukrainian boy, I know your home, your young years, lost.
We write ourselves into existence
on these plains.
Invisible.
Ukrainians.
Jews.

NOTES to VOLUME 1

[Editors' comments in brackets.]
Mandel's notes indented.

Trio

Estevan Saskatchewan.

[Mandel refers to this as his "first" poem (see "Auschwitz and Poetry," *The Family Romance*, Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1986, 3-10). He wrote it in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, in August 1946 during a stopover at the home of an uncle and aunt on his return from the war. He spent part of the year after the war ended in England, taking courses at Khaki University. The "small town" (Estevan became a city in 1957), which "bears the mark of Cain," was named after George *E. Ste*phen and William C. *Van* Horne, builders of the CPR. In light of Mandel's fascination with the double (who, he observed, was born at the primal scene), this masculine doublet at the heart of the origin/word—the herald of other such configurations in his life and work—can be considered an instance of the "uncanny."]

Fuseli Poems [Initial title: *The Fire Place and Other Poems*]

[Dedication: "This book is dedicated to Mimi."]

Ceremony for Rosh Hashonah [Initial title: "Ceremony for a New Year"]

Children of the Sun

> This one is made up of images from Shelley, Yeats, and my own Minotaur poems. I think it says that the Minotaur poems are good poems.

City Park Merry-Go-Round

> I actually saw this merry-go-round in a city park in Saskatoon; but the imagery is the sort of thing you find in German expressionist movies—in fact, it's a cliche about freedom and necessity.

Death of a Poet

> In this one a poet falls to pieces and only language can put him together again.

Doll on the Mantelpiece

> This is the doll poem: the doll is Dresden and she stands over a fire.

Ducks in a Pond

> Started with a passage in Hardy's *Return of the Native*/ "The dog returned from the woods."

Entomology

> This is a summary. In it all the characters are insects, except the poet, who is a tree./ Wilfred Watson's "The Canticle of the H. of History."

Fuseli: Girl Combing Her Hair, Watched by a Young Man

> A Fuseli Poem, based on a Fuseli painting tho[ugh], as Milton Wilson noticed, not only on a Fuseli painting. In this one, the poet is a voyeur or peeping Tom, like the Fuseli Young Man, or King David watching Bathsheba, or Porphyro watching Madeline in Keats' St. Agnes Eve poem. The Castle turns up in this poem too.

The Gold Bug

Here the poet is a success.

Humanities Association

This is a comment on meetings of learned societies and lectures and lecturers and people who read poetry to groups like this one too.

Ice Palace

I wrote this after seeing an actual ice-palace on Pine and Sherbrooke or thereabouts. What struck me then, as it has many others, is that inside the palace everything was blue. It's the old theory about climate [and] nat[ional] character.

Metamorphosis

The imagery…is from *King Lear* as I think is obvious.

Notes from the Underground

This one…is a Sybil character—a prophetess in a cave. And the underwater world comes into it again.

Palinode

I don't remember when [Palinode] was written…. [I]t says that private guilt and private ecstasies are products of or related to a dilemma that's public enough.

Palisade of Images

I should explain that Wallace Stevens was not only a poet but vice-president of one of America's largest life insurance companies, so he seems to me an altogether admirable character, doing what every poet w[oul]d like to do.

Poetic Process

[P]retty obvious comments on poetry; the first is a cliche about the difference b[e]tw[ee]n conception and execution, the inevitable failures; the second about compromises. Here the poet is a failure.

Prologue/Epilogue

["Prologue" and "Epilogue"] are part of sequence which didn't come off—but I saved them anyhow. "Prologue" is a kind of revival meeting poem in which a Preacher prophecies damnation to a community which is having trouble with a stain on its fences or writing on its walls. In some ways, [Epilogue] is my favorite poem because people in 4 cities have written to tell me it's about their mayor. The cities, by the way, are Regina, Edmonton, Calgary, and Estevan. So this is true prophecy because I wasn't thinking about [the mayor], but about Nebachadnezzar and Daniel.

Song

This is an end of the world poem, like Robert Frost's "Fire and Ice."

Two Part Exercise on a Single Image

This began as a description of a scene in St. Jean beside the Richelieu river and turned into a poem on poetry. It might have something to do with private feelings of guilt./ …after seeing *Blood of a Poet.*

Black and Secret Man [Working title: *The Comedians*]

[Dedication:"This book is for Evie and Charles."]

Aesop [initially part of a longer work, "Girl into Stone: A Theatrical Fable"]
[Charles Mandel, Eli's father, was a grocer both in Estevan and in Regina, where the family moved in 1935, so this "fable of a grocer" has biographical resonances.]

The Anarchist-Poets [Initial title: "After Malraux"]

A comment on Beat Poetry—the Beats are essentially anarchistic, a view with which I am in some sympathy, but there's a terrible paradox in anarchism, that it destroys what it wants to preserve.

A Cage of Oats

The image of this has fascinated me as long as I can remember. The prisons are like the Chinese puzzle & the Castle.

The Comedians

I don't know whether this...is a dream vision or a description. It's called "The Comedians" and it's about clowns and also about a kind of underwater world in which people are like fish.

David

David becomes a slingshot in this poem—which takes place just before or just after he has killed Goliath./This one uses the David and Goliath story and images from Camus' *The Plague*. In it David, the giant killer, becomes a slingshot and also the murdered giant.

Departure

This one...gives some peculiar reasons for not remaining in a certain city.

Hebraism

A comment on the Bible which is something more than stories.

Mary Midnight's Prologue

[In the late 1930s, after graduating from Central Collegiate (now gone) in Regina and before joining the Canadian Army, where he served in the Medical Corps, Mandel worked at a drugstore (Angley's Drugstore, 2706 13th Avenue), his family having offered him free tuition if he studied pharmacy. In the drugstore, he later recalled, a female customer pointed at him behind the counter and demanded to know, "why isn't that boy in uniform?" Sickness/madness/war metaphors recur in Mandel's writing, impinged upon by associations with health/doctoring (madness is consistently manifested in Mandel's work through imagery of light). Christopher Smart, on whom he wrote his M.A. thesis at the University of Saskatchewan (1950) and his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Toronto (1957), was for him an emblem of the madness and ecstasy of poetry and, as he speculated, of a gender ambivalence/duplicity at the heart of imaginative thought (magic): Mary Midnight was a feminine persona adopted by Smart. Mandel, incidentally, was intrigued with Robertson Davies' Magnus Eisengrim, the magician of the *Deptford Trilogy*, whose mother went "mad" and whose second, fictional identity was "conceived" in male rape. Gender identities, and ancestries, are, for Mandel, reversible. Smart appears here as a kind of phallic mother closely associated with what Mandel, once remarking on Pope's *Dunciad*, referred to as "the uncreating word." Note here references to male birth, botched birth, unbirth.]

Memo from an Outpost of Empire

Contains a quotation from K[enneth] Clark's *The Nude* which greatly explains the poem—everything is seen from the back view (to put it politely) or inside out.

Only One Reality among Other Orders

In this poem, you'll find a fisherman, people who don't talk to each other, people who talk to themselves, and a professor—whether of English or not, I don't know.

Orpheus and Eurydice

This is an ironic version of how Orpheus lost Eurydice—by looking back at her when he wasn't supposed to. Later, he was torn to pieces by the Bacchantes in a party that sort of got out of hand.

Rapunzel

Rapunzel is about the girl in the fairy tale who was confined in a tower. This time we're in an underground world rather than the underwater world./Based on a picture in an edition of Grimm's fairy tales. The town is like the castle.

Secret Flower

The doors closed in the first but they open in the second in a peculiar way./ This is a Sunday aft[ernoon] at our house—but it's also about the way in which dreams keep interacting with reality—I think—I'm not sure.

There is No One Here Except Us Comedians

...there are no clowns in it.... /a kind of dream vision about doors which are closed, fairgrounds, orphanages, birds and wheatfields.

Thief Hanging in Baptist Halls

A description of what it felt like to come upon this astonishing piece of sculpture hanging in the hall of a modern students' b[ui]ld[in]g at McMaster U[niversity] during a meeting of the Learned Societies.

Yonge Street Minstrel [Initial Title: "And You Too Raymond Souster"]

Ray Souster, a Toronto Poet, is I suppose a proletarian poet—always in the attack against injustice, evil, cruelty, inhumanity, brutality. I see him here as a fighter—I wrote this after I saw him Toronto, last year, some ten years after I first met him.

An Idiot Joy

Girl on a High Wire

She is a *hurt* bird because if she falls she cannot fly—so being up there is a kind of wound./ "The great globe circles." Balloons: circus–cartoon. Shakespeare: theatre — the Globe/birds going up to her./ 2 worlds: hers & mine.../[P]oem about connection between the two./ [O]bviously with *title* first idea of poem was there from beginning—in fact I had been reading Mailer's *American Dream* [and] thinking of the scene in it about walking the parapet..../ Fascinated by circuses: because of 1) distortion, 2) contrast: laughing sad-faced clown/ confusion of reality & illusion, 3) illusion of danger, 4) mirrors./ What can we say about the whole process?/ [I]s about what is revealed about the creative process?/ [I]s composing on typewriter significant?/ [W]hy do we begin at the beginning [and] go right through to end *each* time, each draft?/ [S]ometimes poem begins with line or stanza that turns out to be end of poem or middle./ [C]urious thing here is how relatively clear the structure is from first./ [B]ut note that lines get their rhythm [and] full sense as form develops not one at a time.

The Trance of Poetry

Detachment is total engagement—i.e., a commitment to *all* feeling./ All action is partial (commitment to one set of feelings) and therefore evil./.../ The explosiveness of love is that it requires a poetry of action, which is an impossibility./ I put the difficulty down to God who failed to be particular in such difficult things./ Lately, the Chinese paintings on my wall utter profanities: and yet not one Western man appears on any of these floating hills or muddies with his footsteps the silent waterfall. I must give sound advice to all my students: in preparing for a revolution, first learn how perilous beauty is, that children know rage, that conductors will swear at old men before 9:00 a.m., that a man about to be murdered may feel nothing at all./ The meaning of love (its frenzy) is that it demands a poetry of action, an impossibility./ I put the difficulty down to God who failed to be unambiguous in such difficult matters.

Stony Plain [Working title: *War Measures*]

[Dedication: "This book is for Ann and Sara."]

[Mandel wrote several versions of a Preface to *War Measures*, the longest and most detailed of which is as follows:]

For all that has been written about the startling and sad events of October 1970, it still seems there is a need for a work that would help us to understand the historical and social circumstances and the human drama of that time. This is not that book. Its title and the grouping of poems in the second section of the book perhaps then call for an explanation. How images and allusions present themselves to a writer remains mysterious still. For myself, it has always seemed something like a magical presentation: deceitful and profound. What I have not presumed is to be a historian of our times. Where images of revolution and repression present themselves, they have undergone change, distortion. They are not historical but psychological. Or in the more familiar formula, all characters and events in this book—it should be perfectly obvious—[are] fictional and bear no resemblance to living people or historical events, except what is coincidental and synchronistic. Or I would say they are, here at least, metaphors.

As for politics, the only politics here are "the politics of poetry." The emblem for that is, of course, the incredible one given to us by Goya's servant in his account of the episode at Treuba, the artist tranquilly peering at corpses in the moonlight to discover the composition (?). Or is the emblem that ever mysterious stare of Velasquez as he measures the scene from *Las Meninas*? Put these emblems as a frame about our own concerns, our *language*, and two inescapable facts emerge: how very much in our daily lives is burlesque; how very much is little short of insanity.

This is all I can say about politics or history. My concern is language and, as with my previous books, poetry. This group of poems seems to me at least as personal as any others I have written—not, I hope, private, but particular. I cannot see how this disqualifies one from attempting to understand the uses of whatever it is that comes into the field of vision or from the equally difficult task of maintaining presence of mind, presence. So much in one's own life cannot be avoided.

Envoi

[Published in slightly different form as "Variations on a theme/for Gilles Vigneault" in *The Canadian Forum*, January 1971.]

Oscar Wilde [An earlier version was titled "Christopher Smart"]

On the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz: Memorial Services, Toronto, January 25, 1970 YMHA Bloor & Spadina.

[Some place names invoke Estevan and Regina. The Mandels, after the move to Regina, lived first at 1755 Hamilton Street, less than a block south of the railway station (now Casino Regina). Train sounds, Mandel once recalled, filled his earliest imagination. The Capitol Theatre was located where the Crown Life Building now stands, a short walk south and west from where the Mandel home was situated.]

Translation Table

Evie Mandel first noticed that "Translation Table" could be used as a found poem.

Mary Midnight

[Originally published in Alphabet 8, June 1964. The version printed here follows largely the Coach House Press Manuscript Edition (1979); a small number of obvious typographical errors have been corrected. An earlier typescript copy of *Mary Midnight* includes an additional line at the end of the first stanza of Mary Midnight's words on page 310, as follows:

Until then I say the dust shall fall
Upon you and you shall eat coal
And taste only the shards of coal
Torn from the hillsides and valleys
Of your flesh]

Out of Place

[Preface and photographs are by Ann Mandel.]

Lines for an Imaginary Cenotaph

[R.W.B. Carey, George Hollingdale, and J. B. Mandel are among Estevan's World War II dead; their names appear on the Estevan cenotaph. Mandel talked at length one afternoon with George Chapman, who served in the RCAF but did not go overseas, in Oungre, Saskatchewan, during his return to Saskatchewan in preparation for writing *Out of Place*. George's brother Jim ("the tallest man in the Canadian army") served in the South Saskatchewan Regiment and fought at Dieppe. He died from tuberculosis shortly after his return to Saskatchewan. Jacob Barney Mandel (1918-1944), Eli's cousin, nicknamed "William Tell Mandel" because of his outstanding markmanship, served in a unit commanded by Captain A.W. Hardy, Ann's father. "Jake" Mandel was a scholarship winner ("University of Saskatchewan Scholarship" and "General Proficiency") in 1932 at Estevan Collegiate. In 1946, the Mandel family created the Mandel Memorial Medal for English proficiency at Estevan CI. Jake is buried in France.]

Petroglyphs at St Victor

If you travel to the centre of this continent, cross the Big Muddy badlands of South Sask., you come to a little town, a French-Canadian town called St. Victor. A few miles from there along a steep rise, you reach an outcropping of sandstone, about 2400 feet above the prairie—a cliff—and on that you'll find petroglyphs: carvings in the rock of stick-men, footprints, handprints, animals. They were done by Indians. No one knows which Indians or why. Are they signals? Signs? Religious or sacred drawings? They exist in only one other place on the prairies, at Roche Percee, about 450 [sic] south and west of St. Victor. Whatever they are, they're part of the lost past of this country & to stare at them is to stare at a real cultural mystery. It's that mystery of rock paintings too that's very close to the heart of Atwood's *Surfacing*.

Strike

[The poem recalls the Estevan riots of September 29, 1931, when striking coal miners advanced in a motorcade from Bienfait to Estevan intending to hold a meeting (prohibited by the mayor and town council earlier that day) at the Estevan town hall. Violence escalated when the crowd refused to disperse, leading to shots being fired—at first overhead, then into the crowd. Three miners were killed. They are buried in Bienfait. The common gravestone still bears the inscription (it has survived several attempts to erase it): "Murdered by RCMP." Mandel, though not an eyewitness to the scene, hung on to vivid recollections of the chaos. The 938 Second Street address that Mandel mentions in "sponsors names" is not far from the Fourth and Souris intersection where the shootings took place.]

Epilogue

[St John, Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa are Regina streets. They run parallel, north and south, and intersect with Victoria Avenue (the Trans-Canada highway), where the Mandels moved in 1940 (1503 Victoria). The next year they moved to 1858 Winnipeg Street.]

Life Sentence .

Journal: In the High Mountains, Peru, Ecuador, 1976

[The chronology of the entries is somewhat confused, but we follow the sequence in *Life Sentence*.]

As a poet, critic, anthologist, and teacher, Saskatchewan native Eli Mandel was a major figure in Canadian literature—particularly prairie literature. Mandel fashioned his identity as a post-Holocaust Jewish writer positioned dramatically between extremes of tradition and innovation, nation and region, East and West, producing work which can be read in a variety of contexts and which reflects patterns and changes within Canadian writing from the 1950s to the 1980s. This two-volume edition of the collected poetry of Eli Mandel includes the complete texts of ten previously published volumes of poetry—*Trio, Fuseli Poems, Black and Secret Man, An Idiot Joy, Stony Plain, Out of Place, Life Sentence, Crusoe, Dreaming Backwards,* and the final version of *Mary Midnight,* Mandel's "Oratory" based on Christopher Smart. Also included is an early group of poems which Mandel contributed to a volume entitled *Third Person Singular,* along with eighty-two "new" poems never before presented in a collection.

Mandel spent a lifetime championing poetry, and he did so with more intelligence and generosity than anyone else in Canadian writing. Now that we have these collections of texts that for years have been scattered and out of print, we can begin to see the kind of writer Mandel himself was. In everything he wrote he was shrewd, daring, inventive. He was so aware and focused it is hard to see how he could have known more, or done more. The poems you will find here are unnerving in range, dazzling in accomplishment. Mandel is Canada's least-read great poet. It's time for that to change, it's time he received the kind of attention he for so long accorded others.

—Dennis Cooley

From the vastness of his light-drenched prairie home, and also from its darkness and its cold constrictions, came Eli into poetry—the life of the mind, measuring and seeking to expand, to soar. Poetry was his exile and his truer home, a life sentence wrought with courage and exceptional cunning. There he fought the long battle, fitting his mind to the task at hand, and there he found his moments of grace. This book charts his course, the geography and politics and ambitions and tenderness of Eli Mandel—and how much the richer are we that he passed this way.

—Constance Rooke

ISBN 0-88977-138-3

9 780889 771383

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VOLUME TWO

THE OTHER HARMONY

The Collected Poetry of ELI MANDEL

EDITED BY ANDREW STUBBS AND JUDY CHAPMAN

The Other Harmony

The Collected Poetry of Eli Mandel

— VOLUME 2 —

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edited by
Andrew Stubbs
and
Judy Chapman

CANADIAN PLAINS RESEARCH CENTER
2000

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Canadian Plains Research Center
University of Regina
Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0A2
Canada
Tel: (306) 585-4758
Fax: (306) 585-4699
e-mail: canadian.plains@uregina.ca
http://www.cprc.uregina.ca

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Mandel, Eli, 1922–1992.

The other harmony : the collected poetry of Eli Mandel

(University of Regina publications, ISSN 1480-0004 ; 6)

Includes index.
ISBN 0-88977-138-3

I. Stubbs, Andrew James. II. Chapman, Judy Lea, 1954–
III. University of Regina. Canadian Plains Research Center.
IV. Title. V. Series.

PS8526.A52 A17 2000 C811'.54 C00-920144-0
PR9199.3.M347 A17 2000

Cover Design: Donna Achtzehner, Canadian Plains Research Center.
Cover Photo: Don Hall, University of Regina.

Photos for *Out of Place* (Volume 1, pages 235 to 300) courtesy of Ann Mandel.
All other photos taken near Estevan, Saskatchewan, by Don Hall, University of Regina.

Printed and bound in Canada by
Houghton Boston, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Printed on acid-free paper

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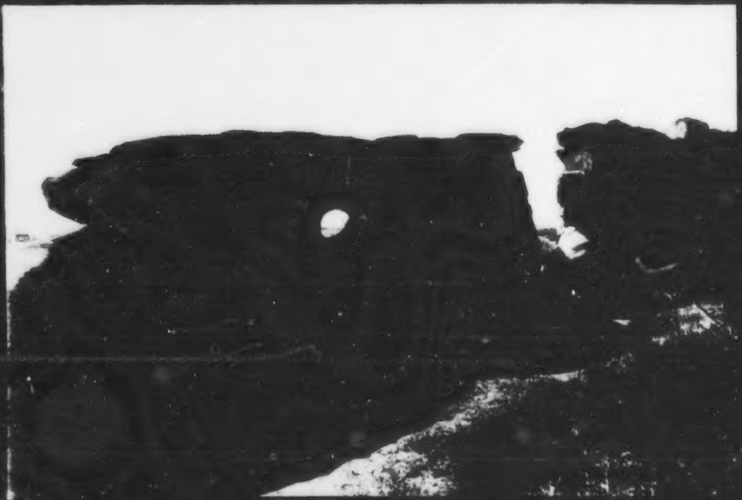
PREFACE

This is Volume 2 of *The Other Harmony: The Collected Poetry of Eli Mandel.* Volume 1 contains the editors' Foreword, *Trio, Fuseli Poems, Black and Secret Man, An Idiot Joy, Stony Plain, Mary Midnight, Out of Place,* and *Life Sentence,* together with notes for the poems in Volume 1. Volume 2 contains three books of poetry—Mandel's contributions to *Third Person Singular,* and the selected volumes *Crusoe* and *Dreaming Backwards*—as well as eighty-two uncollected, unpublished poems, notes for the poems in Volume 2, and two indexes: an index of the first lines of the poems from both volumes and an index of poem titles from both volumes.

OTHER COLLECTIONS/ VERSIONS



THIRD PERSON SINGULAR

Experience

There was a house and a boy;
And one to whom the shy fingers of day were exploring pirates
Was a passionate actor, who by night and in shadows
Completed the plot, acting from crisis to crisis;
His own prompter for the missing lines.

Within such exceptional walls from scene to scene
He went acting, to whom the faultless winds
Were a favorite script, the sun,
Through the pasteboard trees of his memory,
A fine stranger to melt and murder snow.

A border land, a strange frontier
With new stars, a baby moon that stared
And in the sky propounded impossibilities....
Where the soft explosions of spring on a warm front
Puzzled his breath and with bright new tools
Banged at the old plumbing of his heart;

And the green sea, time, lapped at his small geography.

For houses are only islands and are flooded,
The one tree grows wave-weary, the gulls
Flutter and follow the tall ship to sea....

and the unreal dead gather spitefully
to betray the living and the former absence of history,
argue with a child's brain
and a child's game.

The Lab Assistants

In the morning they decide, legitimately, to awake;
Eyebrows turned back, and shaved
To the consistency of fawn leather,
The young men severally adjust their smocks,
Their ties, their shoes and minds—
Equating the ionic values of their world.
And I have seen the shell-rimmed electrons
Circling the neutral orbits of their eyes.

Each day they apply with neat starched fingers
The adequate lesson; their trade makes
A chemical decision of their face…
Reflects: "The segment measured, weighed
And balanced, interpolate a decimal and with care
Solve for uncertainties."
                    Then, stuffed like a very large owl,
They sit unblinking with a glass-eyed placidity
On the shelf of my intense and wonderful
Confusion.

Wherefore yon sun and the youthful music of the lily
Troubles my gaze (Thy slim young body perhaps,
And thy flaxen limbs) and a hoard of ancient things,
—ere life eke everlasting did befall—
Sweet Thames, makes poetry, until I end my song
creeps in between their split-second answer and
unbalances the equation
                              undoes
the startled mathematics of my heart. He spoke
and down he fell.

Letter for a New Year

Standing in the heart of darkness or silence,
In the cathedral of broken trees, in the rain,
You sang to me, my German girl, your long blond hair
Like the whips of your booted boy whom I had killed,
Who killed my Jewish cousin. "Ich liebe diche."

Now the student, clothed in old journeys,
Visits in familiar places; carefully
Retards his anguish and allows his soul
To stretch from page to page, the cover of a book.
And the great plains are as dear as his mirror
To discover from Europe, a blankness on a silver shine.

Given to long appraisal and the soft assertion,
Whispers of slant argument and dialectic honour,
Grows pale if his dreams will threaten
To dynamite at all costs
Through rocks to wells bursting with oil.

Europe is not here. How can we be given to great praise?
Remember the fallen, crying, "I am the forward half
Of your time, why let me go?" We shall go
Blind, hollow and stagger through streets yet
Since we languish; crying dirty tears at our death,
Not the celebrated black and white death of great men.

So we have done it twice, faith of our fathers.
Our blood turned to patriotic fire, flared
With brief mischief, tugging the quick trigger;
One blossom exploded the night,
Made a flash photograph of our passion,
Then left December alone with snow and skin.

And the student of manners, of good conduct,
And citizenship, readjusts his ruffled
Canadian passion like a professorial robe;
Reports in his thesis; Europe
Is a country of cathedrals.
I have visited Cologne.

While blood booms back and forth a quartered message still,
Moves also to learning, questions the dialectic of
The broken cathedral of trees
Where the blond aryan girl and the dead Jew stretch arms
Like crosses to the rain; "Ich liebe diche."

Therefore let us present to the student
With his thesis on morals, in his hands
The fabulous future, while the rain falls
Impartially on all the plains and on the cathedrals.

Poem

Strange inhuman brothers who won't hear
How this begging wind has hissed a large
Exigency. Stopped like a gibbet by a rose
Or garden, they won't hear how it begs
From the church, begs from the shopkeeper,
Begs from a kiss. Never so angry as a kiss
My heart skips like a muffled drum,
Shaking its way through anxious skin
Like thieves housebreaking on the moors,
The last street, the last house
And a stale and starving room.

The war has taught me to conceal
The frantic posture, cracking of limbs,
Cracking of trunk and heart.
But the trees still stretch in the queer frost.
The blood gathers black and congealing.
The crashed and splintered arms,
An angry face cut in the snow like stone,
A cross, claw at that wind's broken brain.

The Age Has Reason for Its Age

Baudelaire's women, like flowers, wind around my dream;
Some fondling dwarfs, some skeletons, some ancient men.
The skies are opened; in a rushing stream
Demoniac figures plunge and dance like rain.

Crude verses crazy poets fling at me and laugh;
A lewd and profane balladeer makes song
Into a passion play to frighten Christ,
And Passion, in a long low gown, plays
Coyly in a chair with an orange cat.

"Christopher," I say to the bearded man;
In a pensive mood, he thinks
While stars expire faintly as a breath;
"Christopher, my friends are dancing here,
The dance is long, though Time is just a dwarf.
Time limps, Time drags a broken leg,
Come join the dance; regale us with a song."

Carefully butting his cigarette, he rose;
Walked from the corner, adjusted his lapel.
Ah, now the sadness and the gentle look,
I thought, "FORGIVE THEM," perhaps
His quiet voice will say;
One savage look at all the crowd he throws.
Took Passion, danced with Her,
And in the morning
Quiet, he walked away.

Afternoon in a Cafeteria

The hour splits, and half-unseen
Trails its black fragments through our words.
We ignore time and restless in our dream
Let minutes wind like violins, weird
In the smoke of cigarettes around our heads.

One, half aware of the world outside
Looks up cautiously to eye the thing,
Certain to be frightened if I said,
"There the stranger plays upon his string
In his blue ariettes around our heads."

If I should chance to say, "There,
In the midst of coffee cups and butts,
The invisible song curls like a hair,"
Time and our coffee would explode;
We might be left just anywhere;
The world might end.

The hour comes together; its black hulk hangs
Dog in the corner, like a hoax,
A sad St. Bernard perpetrated on our afternoon.
We console its presence with a joke.

Ulysses

I wonder what Ulysses thought as he set out,
Close to the legendary isle; lips set and firm,
Beard curled and brave upon the sea;
What subconscious whirlwinds twirled beneath that brain,
Knowing of personal dangers such as we evade.

Think of him pacing his deck no wider than a room,
Eyeing the sea for dragons, suspicious of a smile or song
That might, clever were the sirens, turn a man to pig.

He must have lived in separate thought than us,
Who would wax the ears of sailors.
I think he who had slaves knew what enslavement meant.
He could have let them be skinned on that island.
But his eye fixed on a prophecy, wife weaving the story,
Lashed to a mast, a wheel, he let the boat go on
Rocking in the classic pattern of an old sea.

The Minotaur

It happens easily when the light flares around you
And you are gay in the warmth and easy sun
With admiring friends hung round like mirrors;
You are given a string and sent winding
Where walls and paths roar with vagueness.
The taut string springs final warning down your nerves
And you are out in the labyrinth, an unbelieving sacrifice.

Round the last corner the vast arena spreads
The terrible circle, and your eyes go to the centre
Where the beast raises his slow head,
The bull neck, the horns and spreading nostrils;
Crouched on his carnage alone with the bones of men.

Holding your string you prepare for his rage.
His small eyes meet yours and you grow hot with his violence.
How he hates in the labyrinth and grows rage with murder
Into a garden of white bones, piling white bones
Into a jumble of gleams in the bad glare of a white sun.

Always you face the beast with his rage of killing
And he hates, being alone, in the terrible centre;
Wearing his task, tearing the cloth of man,
Adding by year youth and the gay light.

Always the string leads you back
To belief and the better world, but you are gone
From the time when light·flared around you
With a gay wash of warmth and an easy sun.

Poem

How else should I praise the heart's excellence in season?
Erect art with handsome grass, the imagination
Stones logic to silence and daggers into reason.

Else winters us into drifts and ruts;
Skeletons our hands; draws the skin tight
And skulls the face with tips of horrid thought.

How else should I do it but love the sea of me
Which waters the sight and by waves makes
The ghost of my coastline hard-sanded and free;

The crooked ghost of past and lost time
Candling its flame through wax and melted me?
How else honour the fame that lives through mine?

Not surely save praise or start a heart
For the wreath-bearers, sorrowing their grief
And salting it with envy of their hurt;

If not envy, then what bequest unrolls
From their careful tears placed on the earth?
That death act tombs and carves beneath my soul.

What other honour is to man but with laughter?
Youth does it by staring at cripples,
Endures, and pins merriment on the weak and bereft

Or only the older; by staring too long can braze
The eyeball to stone and still to chill marble
The long strokes of death's eraser,

By wishing, waste the eager leap of time to sun,
River the blood into a driving stream,
Unshadow and make statement into man.

The Sleep-Walker

Here he took a flower, touched to the soil
A superstitious finger, and here a cup of snow;
Patterned those diamonds to his slow awakening
And aching nerves, like flakes, left on the cloth
The broad stain of a wet and melting spot.

Walked in a windstorm and listened to doctors
Probing the nervous tendons; blocked the wide doors
With bolts to hold desire and make the grey
Academy a world with paths, walls
Gardens and a room to study.

Occurred in the burnt pattern of his heart
The ashes, folding their arms, stubborn and insistent
Like pain, raining steadily in even sheets,
His steps, stunned to a motionless walking
And his sleep-talk made neither poem nor wit
For the classic severity of science.

Not able to touch in his brown dream
The clean awakeners pushed him to daylight,
Urged their merry action and mummery
Upon him, like the sun, forcing his eyes
To fly open from his closed fantasy of love;
Speaking of their virtue together and to him

Of what flimsy architecture he had built in
Fervid darkness, trying new lines without sight.
But the sleep-walker turned from their bright
Congratulations, and was left in a corner
Grieving his dream, the perfect mourner.

Song

"Who is the puppet, and who the puppeteer?"

Through drifts and snow, steps fumble in a path.
The puppet moves and clicks along the walk.
In a dance, the people are moving through the park
Along the streets, dancing, where ice and colored signs are sharp.

Snow muffles sound and you can't hear the dance.
The puppet lifts a wooden face and sings.
The lights go on and off; the audience applauds
With one sharp stroke, leans forward,
Separates the strings.

The wind lifts up, a vein of snow trails out.
The puppet laughs and laughs into the snow.
A pale and absent smile is hung along the street
Where figures move and dance, and in the colored lights
Inhuman faces glow.

Now Who Will Celebrate

Now who will celebrate the aged, ungracious queen,
Romance, the fleet of ships born from her eyes?
Helen is ancient now, the paint wears thin.
That smile is grown crooked as a lie.

Note how the wrinkles creep beside her eye,
Swelling like flowers after heavy rain.
The celebrated goddess has been raped
And rape repeats a prelude in her brain

And yours. This is how poetry begins,
Drumming a little, saccharine, in your mind;
Repeats: Helen is old. Helen is very old.

Love Song

Gladly we watch the red and ready sun
I and the girl who walks along with me.
The sky turns whiskey-sour, the night comes on.
Watching the night she is prepared for me.

We walk, whisper, the stars appear.
A spanish guitar amors the world for her,
Plucking at sentiment in drops like tears,
Burning at each drink, adroit but furred.

Carry this soap opera fifteen minutes to the end,
The sponsor has a few words to say before we're through
A short pause for identification then you
May go on with whatever you choose to do.

So the stars wheel twice around her brain
Run madly into comets, burst and flare.
In the courtyard I leave her, in the morning
I leave, on a paved and marble-patterned stair,
Standing with flowers and moonlight in her hair.

Time like a dope-fiend takes a powder
Runs stupidly in the quiet air, grows old,
Grinning from painted lips to pointed ears.
The last house of cards collapses, the deck is cold.

The Lover

In a room where everyone is neat and starched
He comes in like the wet laundry;
His bedraggled soul unwraps like an unpressed sheet
And flaps at the ordered people, who, being polite,
Avert their eyes from somebody else's wash.

(Coasting in on his head at full sail
He watches eternity in every second;
From the bow of his clipper he hollers
Like the wind…
"I look for you always, always.")

Oh he is unstarched, unpressed and sodden.
Machines have been turning him over and over
Slapping his sides and his soul;
While she, inadvertently, switches the power to full
And grinds him in a wringer till he's done.

Hung like underclothes on the line of her person
He struggles in a wind which he beautifully creates.
No one is noisier, more violent, so attached;
She holds him easily with the clothespins of her smile.

While he suffers on the line, in his own wind,
He is smiling at the unlovely people
Who have finished with laundry.
Where the sun of her body comes out to dry him,
He steams in the air, in her brightness he's shining.

To a Lady Who Danced the Spanish Dances When the Room Was Dark and Snowlight Fell from the Cold Window

The room became a stage.
Lights fixed and spotted from snow
beamed long and across
a tense and accurate audience
leaning forward with critical eyes.

You became stern and attentive.
Denied the public and exacted passion
from the composer; sang to him,
caressed his face and closed
his poor mad eyes with talented fingers.

The madness of being one thing and its target
seized the crazy poet who laughed to himself
and sang with your arms and your long body

While the soft long town of music came about you
and you went farther and farther down the streets
searching with your high gentle eyes
for a field where dawn is and music ends

And the poet cried because you were going
down the streets and along the hills
farther and farther away from him
wrapped in your music like a Spanish shawl.

To a Lady Who Acts

You bring a delicate, precise, emotion to the house.
Around you the supporting cast turns and genuflects.
The tableau takes form and built over bodies
You arise, stretch carefully exquisite hands
And register the final tragedy.

Such watersnake emotion writhes throughout the act.
In pattern ah very like the script, hearts come
And kneel to you and fall.
Your quiet voice trembles and pronounces
In the most exact diction, Love,
Bearing its passion like a golden box.

As gracious as a queen you accept the burden
(heavy though it is)
And deep in cool water, sail graciously away,
Trimming your canvas like a small Egyptian craft.

My voice stammers wickedly under stars
Watching you go, while down from that sky
Dreams come pattering, raining in my eyes.

To a Lady in a Dark Corner

Belted, uncouth and black as the evening,
Which like an uncowled monk, comes
Treading his destructive path through afternoons
To an alcoholic sunset untidily spread like wine,
Excommunicate and unfrocked, I shall go on loving you.

Also despite that Heathcliff's damaged, darkened soul
Is somewhat beyond me, moor-bound and savage
As that twisted tree, I will pursue my love,
Humourless and grim; Envy the shadows
That may cup and hold with eloquent embrace
The deepened hollow and curve of your cheeks;
Declare my eyes are fork-tongued serpents
Flickering a green anger at the wind that moans
About you and traces with its fingers
Instead of mine, your extravagant delicate features.

Dawn will find me maintaining a deliberate frown;
Scowling at the intense fragility and good taste
Of morning's approach which like a gentleman's
Agreement bows in a polite company.

So to all things courteous and pleasant,
Manners, the accepted graces, chivalry
And the public mores, I shall be exile;
Expressing a profound, discourteous jealousy
And an ugly mood. (And never again be seen
In the pagan charms of Attic temples;)
Pursuing my course among the Gothic arches,
Fixed on the church wall with an angry face,
Gazing down at your elegance in the courtyard
Or the corner, where you accept the courtesies
Which will inevitably be yours; while my love for you,
A pig-iron dragon, stares with its gargoyle eyes.

Operation "Love"

(The amputation was a success;
since I will have none of you,
I leave you some of me.)

Asceptic, my doctor smiles down at me again
Who am his patient rising from that dream
Where ether stuffed a suffocating palm
Across my mind, and the instrument separated
The amputee from his limb.

Brain stops reeling in the double dream.
World focusses again.
A nurse with a cool hand
Measures a recovering pulse,
Whispers a word and is gone.

Solemn and sacred at my feet, like the arm that is gone
Lies a small love; attendants will arrive
And carry it out on a platter that is man.

Convalescent, I take my single-handed soul
In its one grip, learning to live lop-sided
And do with a hand and a hook
What two arms have done before.
Since I believe that hands are so great
A part of love, I will be able
To love others with only half of me now.

Sunday Night

Wind patterns snow in old arrangements,
Trees know, acknowledge and accept.
The universe is a soft light brush of hair, tonight.
The universe brushes softly in your hair.

I, who in April, sang a little while
Will sing no longer
When the snow is on your hair tonight
And on your dead lips, the wind
Is kissing snow much softer
Than the hollows of your throat or palm.

Shall I wear black tonight and scowl?
You are gone. The universe still brushes
Softly in the long hair of the night;
In trees, in stars,
My little dreams expire.
The wind is kissing snow
Much softer than your lips, tonight.

I have heard no cries, no wild sobbing.
None tear at clothes or spread their hair with ashes.
The universe is beautiful, my love.
The few gone mad are mad
But not of love.
The sane will wander about a little while longer,
Staring in mirrors, asking about memories,
And finally in all their rooms, gone white as an aspirin,
Will clutch their stiff hands to their breaking skulls.

The wind is kissing lips
And patterns snow tonight.

Ars Poetica of E.W.M.

You will wonder, Voltaire, that a young man
Scarcely twenty
Can fret over his verses…

A bird studying music;
Grass with a notebook on "How to Grow."

Not do high deeds and not fret over dying,
Or say, "reason enough has been in the singing."

With poor Pound mad in Italy,
Where beauty's broken window
Scants and tilts in the sun.

CRUSOE

in the dark wood, a way

Crusoe

1

Greek men dance alone.
The Hebrew yells at stone.
Others eat glass.
Name your own vice, Englishman.

2

The snail's trace:
doubtful words.

Do not ask how I have come
to an exact madness
or what my keepers name
the frenzy of compliant sense.

The dancer alone in his dance
utters the terrible sound of his limbs.

3

This was written for a foundling,
alien, Greek, Hebrew,
to the memory of my sane parents,
in order not to go mad,
and for my keepers' sake,
that I might learn
singular love

no other is to blame.

Minotaur Poems

I

It has been hours in these rooms,
the opening to which, door or sash,
I have lost. I have gone from room to room
asking the janitors who were sweeping up
the brains that lay on the floors,
the bones shining in wastebaskets,
and once I asked a suit of clothes
that collapsed at my breath, and bundled and
crawled on the floor like a coward.
Finally, after several stories,
in the staired and eyed hall,
I came upon a man with the face of a bull.

II

My father was always out in the garage
building a shining wing, a wing
that curved and flew along the edge of blue air
in that streamed and sunlit room
that smelled of oil and engines
and crankcase grease, and especially
the lemon smell of polish and cedar.
Outside there were sharp rocks, and trees,
cold air where birds fell like rocks
and screams, hawks, kites, and cranes.
The air was filled with a buzzing and flying
and the invisible hum of a bee's wings was honey
in my father's framed and engined mind.
Last Saturday we saw him at the horizon
screaming like a hawk as he fell into the sun.

III

They chose among us in the fall of the year,
by lot, behind fierce masks designed of sign
to ward off the imminent descent of the sun people;
someone talked of a dying god, as if
the young ones among us believed in
that any more, others cautioned us against the voices
we were always supposed to hear and these
were stubborn about the women crying.
I remembered the face of one who brought me here
when they drew my name in the hall,
it was her persuasion in the beginning,
something about fathers.
                                        Like the others before me,
I saw only their breasts that appeared on the walls,
legs moving in unison, the swaying of sweat-stained
bodies and their half closed eyes:
all the talk about signs when I knew
the boys were only waiting for the
women to undress, as they always did,
                                        snickering
and those same fields that make a dawn in vision
where birds begin to live in rocks and screams.
It is hard to feel free of accusation
because of eyes
although there is a difference between revelation
and action bellied into life, between
believing in voices
and knowing the chances that we have to take.

IV

Now I am dressed in a multitude of rooms
like a Chinese box, and slip from covers
into covers   Dawn will not help me nor
the day's exposure   I am a prodigious pun
to hide and show myself between these walls
this otherwise where sunlight
dressed in a tweed suit pursues me
or a stranger in the rooms
          and footfalls on the stairs
and eyes   and over all
     the whispering and chattering of the walls
          the pipes and hammered arteries of the place.

Is that a revelation in a field of light
competing with a shadow on the rock?
A bird's shadow seen from here?
Or a cloud between the sky and land
footed and patterned into phrases?

It is hours since I have been in here.
If I had once seen anything
except birds,
rocks, land, and all winter long
                         the ice and snow

V

Within these walls I am to look for light
Or hold an abstract in my hand as firm
As apples or the golden bar the older men
Returned to us. Remember that. That spring
There were those crowds and crowds below the cliffs
This side of town and all along the beach,
Flags out, booths filled with toys, and one,
The better salesman of the lot, a beggar
From the north had miniatures of bars
That went like hotcakes. Fleece for the crowd.
A replica to keep you as it kept our men
This winter past. Then noise, flocks wheeling overhead,
The painted ship, a bauble on the sea, came like a toy
To harbour.
                    And the tall bronzed men descended
Between the cheers and speeches at the harbour mouth,
Talk about campaigns in lands we'd never heard of,
Cheers and lewd remarks and laughter, the look
In other eyes, and counting of the crew
And stooping at the gaps aghast.
That was another death, the shock in surf,
The rock's point of view, the hawk
Momentarily composing before the fall
His target of a landscape from the sky.
The trailing plume before the dark.
Night on the beach
                                and smoke
                                from new charred campfires.

VI

Orpheus

The Welshman by the pit whose Sabbath voice
Would set the week to peace,
Picked over coal and said he knew
The inside of our god, his transformation
Out of tree, the face in black,
Stamped on the walls he picked. This metaphor,
He said, the pit shaped underneath him into black
And pitied words that moved the leaves or sang
Together flocks, or shook the dull and herded animals.

His pity also took between the rocks
Some still alive who saw the black and second
Hand that clawed them, and he mocked in Welsh
Whatever shades fell back, and cursed and sang
Back to their second death those grave ghosts.

Who found his body and who found his head
And who wiped god off his eyes and face?

Estevan Saskatchewan

A small town bears the mark of Cain,
Or the oldest brother with the dead king's wife
In a foul relation as viewed by sons
Lies on the land, squat, producing
Love's queer offspring only,
Which issue drives the young
To feign a summer madness, consort with skulls,
While the farmer's chorus, a Greek harbinger,
Forecasts by frost or rings about the moon
How ill and black the seeds will grow.

This goodly frame, the earth, each of its sons,
With nature as a text, and common theme
The death of fathers, anguished in betrayal
From the first family returns a sacrifice
Of blood's brother, a splintered eyeball
Groined in the fields, scarecrow to crows.
This warns Ophelia to her morning song,
Bawdy as a lyric in a pretty brain gone bad,
While on those fields the stupid harvest lies.

Ice Palace

Only the blue men
of Saskatchewan
and the blue women
of Quebec

swim these white bone halls
the palace of King Skeleton
and only blue ones could.

Journey through his land alone.
For blue men do not speak
the way you speak, or cry
hail and farewell.

They squeak
like eels on ice

or needles on a gramophone.

Prologue

I think it was burned on. And the smell:
No one would go near it for days after it appeared.
There was hell to pay in the council, everyone
Dredged muck out of the past. The mayor quit.

They tried whitewash. Seen it anyhow, blacker
Than sin on Sunday. Tried burning. Smoke choked
The town for days, the fence was still there.

Bees swarmed, honey of smoke, out of the old
Witch tree and got into the kitchen chimney,
Stung the cook and she quit too.
Slop all over the wall where she threw the pail.
The air was blue with bees and words.

Preacher says,
                        Hell fire aint good enough.
Preacher says,
                        It burns and it aint burned.
Kind of like drought. The day's coming.
The fine critter bouncing on the hill
Aint the same when she's laid low.
Skinned she's awful.
Like the insides of a calving cow.

And you can't blow the spots off a leopard anyhow.

Epilogue

When our mayor was put out to eat grass
And on the street manholes opened like eyes,
Everyone said it had come from below
Because the street was nervous, empty,
And the sewers rumbled for days, the wires
Sang in the high wind and cracks appeared
In the grey cement like folds in an elephant's hide.

Everyone said it had come from below
Because the banks toppled over like great gods
And fire flamed out of the mouth of the stock exchange,
And our bird-like mayor, a hoofed thing,
Galloped away to the green fields in the country.

Mail Order Catalogue

(logos of things in the outhouse
paradigm of experience
from beginning: abdominal belts
to end: zippers, lightning

the art of communication
icons of the graffitic world):

bound, stretched, boned women
hung by the harps of their hair
the wire of their thighs

unravished brides   fence
an acre of grass, a seed plot

and what mysterious rites
of harrow, plot, and drill

and hired men walking on the hill
all in a blaze of fire, the wire
strung from their hands like harps
fencing the acres

                    stays, pants,
the attic urn, scored in the grain
a low relief, a lowing heifer,
a bull on the wall.

Souris Valley

You will ask how I came here. In my 36th year
by libraries and paintings, and the landscape
now northern, a bruised sky, punctured by pines,
and how the university could tolerate me,
what night it was I hung from the rock
and whether my father knew.
                                        I met
murder on the way and the face of a Principal,
in the rock I saw the hands of moralists
and the drowned officer who served my warrant
crying, on my rock this first church.

You will understand how much of this is description,
how in the valley mothers would gather, the river
swollen, the mustard milky and sticky, breasted plant,
and how icy sons blossomed like crystal.

Departure

There was merely a brief note:
"Have seen Edmonton
am leaving at once."
                        I think:
it must have been the buildings
or perhaps the art gallery
or even the university.

But his friends tell me
he had no ambition
his children were slovenly
recently he recovered from a strange disease
he no longer knows what numbers are
nor understands the language spoken here.

Doll on the Mantelpiece

Here on the mantel where a Dresden doll
Looks into a frozen german hill
All is still, chill, white,
Except the red stain on her lips,
The blood of colour there.

She is poised for a dance above the fire,
A hand out for a partner neither here
Nor anywhere. The fire breathes below
A savage noise of wood and she looks out
Over the white hill, still as a doll,
Chill in her world of ivory.

Why do I think of clowns, of emperors,
Of Nietzsche in his tower and all Berlin
Falling in flames while this silly doll
Stands on a fire, calm beside a frozen hill?

Ducks in a Pond

1

Hairy and huge, old sun stood
up to his neck in a slough
and ever from his coronal arm
coins to mallards he threw
and mallards in a spume of mire
leaped to the touch of web and fire.

2

One must have a cold, reedy skin
(touching this question of fire)
to tread out a frothy zeal
under the armpits of a hairy wheel
under the arm of the sweating sun
to maunder in a slough of sweat
and skin, of water touched by fire.

3

About the death of ducks in ice
I know nothing, but mallards know
of Franklin underfoot, his men
on Boothia and their frozen dance
in snowy froth that stoned the eye,
the sun a cataract in a blinding day.

4

The zeal of ducks for noise
(touching this question of fire)
is not the music that I hoped to hear
(Isaiah's coal, the final choir)
but poise of mallards in a pool
as in the pupil of an eye where fire
burned on water seems a pose of praise
sufficient for the gabble of my days.

Notes from the Underground

A woman built herself a cave
    and furnished it with torn machines
    and tree-shaped trunks and dictionaries.
Out of the town where she sprang
    to her cave of rusting texts and springs
    rushed fables of indifferent rape
    and children slain indifferently
    and daily blood.

Would you believe how free I have become
    with lusting after her?
                    That I have become
    a melodramatist, my friends ashamed?

I have seen by the light of her burning texts
    how the indifferent blood drips
    from the brass mouths of my friends,
    how at the same table I will eat
    and grow fat.

Her breasts are planets in a reedy slough.
Lie down beside that slough awhile
    and taste the bitter reed

Read in the water how a drowning man
    sings of a free green life.

There Is No One Here Except Us Comedians

1

In what we call dreams I see
a fairground of wheels inside wheels
where I am turned into nobody
nobody's son nobody's daughter

and orphanages
where children
drag toward iron gates yellow dolls
and huge rolling balls
made in the shape of towering fathers

2

I pray nightly for release
I ask of a door shaped like a bat
to fly away with me
I want to be in a wheatfield
stupid as grain yellowing in the sun
I want to be something like a bird,
part reptile, able to stare blankly
for minutes
            at jade trees
            at jewelled grass
            the crystal city

whispering blasphemy
I want to walk over the doors of the city
my bird feet tinkling at keyholes

I want you to know I am innocent
I want you to open the last door
into the field of orphan wheat
the orient grain the green golden corn

Two Part Exercise on a Single Image

I

I come into the desolation
Of this calm September town
Which slants out of morning
Into the wild disaster of sunlight,
And I see that my street is a tree
Split into a thousand sentences
Any one of which can hang me.
The sun shatters my tree
In a wind of light
Into a torch in the unexplained
Interior, luminous with volcanoes,
Dark fig trees, and the white
Question mark of a polar bear.

II

You think it's easy? A matter of words?
You wonder that I'm a poor speller?
Let me tell you this has nothing to do with
Teaching, or even the love of poetry.
It is an eyesore, a stye,
A social disaster. Look for once
At the real, ridiculous self
Crouched in the unexplained interior.
See it looming in the light of
Exploding volcanoes, dark fig trees,
Like the hunched white question mark of
A polar bear.
                    Oh my friend
I too like company
And have ambitions in business.

Song

When the echo of the last footstep dies
and on the empty street you turn your empty eyes,
what do you think you will see?
A hangman and a hanging tree.

When there are no more voices
and yet you hear voices singing
in the hot street,
what do you think will be their song?
Glory to the hangman who is never wrong.

When on the hot sands of your burning mind
iron footsteps clang no more
and blind eyes no longer see
and voices end,
what do you think will be your plea?
Hanging isn't good enough for me.

The Gold Bug

a poisonous bee burst his pod
in the palm of my hand
                                        his venom
flowed over my hand like honey

now honoured among men
I gesture with my golden hand
and I speak with the language of money

Palinode

I don't suppose that poems can be made
Of private shame, of shame, or sham
Excesses of the spirit.
                    Modest Locke
Once closed the door to godliness
And in his shaded room saw nothing
Of the wide, bruised sky of spring.
He said, the underbrush is thick,
Until we've hacked a way through it
We cannot know the shape of practical despair.

I say that it was spring,
And it was then as if with prison bars
The ruler sun had strictly lined the air,
As if a kind of Dali plain, empty of bush,
Stretched out, as if the first ants
Of the year crawled on the sky,
And it was then I saw that private men
Were dragging loads of bone and flesh
In sackfuls to the edges of the plain.
I cried to stop it, saying, God, you know,
Inhabits each man's breast. Look at the sky,
The sun is Blake in excess of his glory
Come to clothe the naked twigs, and looked
And saw the drop of blood that hung there
And saw it run and spread and soak the men
And saw it seeping, in the spring, out of those sacks.

The Fire Place

A furnace is of stone and clay,
A fire burns inside the stone,
Beside the flame Fuseli lay,
The heart within it was his own.

Fuseli, when the witch came in,
Raised the roof above his stone,
On her thighs he painted sin,
On her head a horse's mane.

From her lips a vocal moth
Issued screaming to the smoke,
Augustan ladies in their mirth
Gathered folds about her smock.

In the smoking cup a sea,
By the bed a painted ship,
In the door a massive key,
On the floor an open trap.

Coupled with a horse a man
Leans upon her breast; he sighs;
Flaming curtains issue then
In between the witch's thighs.

Pillar of Fire

A man came to my tent door
in the heat of the day, the tent
stretched and slapped in the wind.
All the guy ropes went taut
and I felt my temples stretch
and throb in the noise and heat.

He talked about blowflies,
plague among the swollen cattle.
He asked about the children.
"You are a great nation.
Will you stay here long?"

That night the fire in the tent
vomited a great smoke.
The tent glowed like a furnace.
I dreamt about Egypt and its flies,
a priest dying of cancer.
I am told to breed more children,
try not to think about politics,
remember the Sabbath and my enemies.

Mr Mandel's Sermon

I have heard singing and thought how singing maddens
the singers because their mouths are open in a shriek
and the strained muscles of the faces pull down the eyes
in a clown's cry.
                    Around the stake where the dying bear
has lolled for several days the singers are open-mouthed
and at the pit where the bear baited the virgin
                                                            where
the court musicians squeezed the rare mouth-sweat
into the petals of their horns like bees dripping
honey on the horns of lilies
                                        the song was a bridegroom
pacing his claim to the tent of his blue bride.

This cosmic song was sung my murderous friends
by you who raped the bear's girl before you hurled
her in the pit and you in whom the stake is never still.

Map of Love

I was sure that his children were lousy
and his wife's eczema thickest
around her thighs
                    like a map
of a tyrant's gradual conquest
of Europe
            or a medical diagram
of the advanced tumours of love.

Metamorphosis

Looking at her, my eyes magnified by anger,
I saw her nose collapse to nostrils in her face,
her eyes narrow, her eyelids disappear,
her lips extend into a pointed, yellow beak;
I thanked the transformation of my rage
that gave me vision.
                    Later,
I discovered my eyes were little stones
and on my hand instead of hair were quills,
and in my blood, not hers, the reptile crawled.

Intellectual beauty, how we are shrunken now.

The Other Harmony: Not Imitation

Nothing simple: a particular lie
spreads like ink on a Rorschach card
like clouds upon the moon
                              and she
in the inky arms of the octopus
deep in the bottled sea
                              and dizzily
is my squalid, squat, and masculine
mother.

            I made this (decked out
as a dandy) and I have made other
seas
      and shall again in winter
sail farther than Saskatoon or Calgary.

Pictures in an Asylum

The shock is
        do not honour verity
        that lie you told, it is here
        under the sea, under the sea

the shock is
        do not love so many
        love is the stone that tears
        the bladder on the yellow sea

the shock is
        things are what they seem to be
        there is no god
        no love nor verity
        under the sea

and the shock is
        sharp as ice-picks in the brain
        the child is sane
        the child is sane again

Charles Isaac Mandel

These uplands of the suburban mind,
sunlit, where dwell the lithe ironists,
athletic as greeks, boy-lovers,
mathematical in love as in science.
Formalists. What have I to do with them?
I gather the few relics of my father:
his soiled Tallis, his Tefillin,
the strict black leather of his dark faith.

Landscape

The tree shaped like a lock against the sky
And the river like a door and like a key

The sorrowing sun looks in, there is a rim
Around the world, ships topple from the rim

Into the sun but topple back and still are here,
There is a rim and the river shuts like a door.

The tree shaped like a coffin or a nail
And the river like a dark misshapen door

And the sun crouched in his terrible lair
Looks in on the falling ships, the unmusical

Falling ships, and the trees lined up the wall
Like mourners at my mother's funeral.

Jewish Cemetery in Edmonton

If one could move bloodlessly
through the razor air
                                        but
the white blood of the snow
drips on the wounded earth.

Trees, apprehensive as vines,
quiver over the slit veins.

Who, with his mouth, will stop
this cold blood or put his root
or seed into this vain wound?

Day of Atonement: Standing

My Lord, how stands it with me now
Who, standing here before you
(who, fierce as you are, are also just),
Cannot bow down. You order this.
Why, therefore, I must break
If bend I will not, yet bend I must.

But I address myself to you thus,
Covered and alert, and will not bare
My self. Then I must bear you,
Heavy as you are.
                    This is the time
The bare tree bends in the fierce wind
And stripped, my God, springs to the sky.

Overheard at the Gaza Mill

I don't like evasion any more than you do
    but to speak out at this time
    is more dangerous than you might think:
    do you know what they burn on Fridays
    and why, and what they carry back?

Even with an inviolate ethic this happens:
    the market brilliant as blood
    soiled relics on the street
    and the athlete carted, a bundle of bones,
    into the ruined stadium, his owners profiting.

David

all day the gopher-killing boys
their sling-shot arms
their gopher-cries

the king insisting
my poetry must stop

I have written nothing since May

instead
walk among the boys
gopher-blood on their stretched
hands
murder will end murder
the saying goes, someone must
do something about the rodents
and poems do not:
even the doctors
admit that it's plague
ask me about my arms
look
at my shadow hanging
like a slingshot

the world turns like a murderous stone
my forehead aching with stars

Songs from the Book of Samuel

i

the intellect does not age, the body dies
daily the mind declares its lies
about the soul, about the self
about the body and its ageless cries

now mind grows freer as the body dies
daily the body ages in its lies
about the mind, about the self
about the mind's clear sense of paradise

ii

I forgive the adulterer, I forgive the song
I forgive the straw man in my bed
I forgive the old man his lies about the bed
I forgive my armies for their arms
I forgive the generals for their boots
and the mayors for their homes
and the councillors
                                        my mother
for her prophecies, my father
for his mistaken comfort in failure
my teachers for their religion
I forgive the girl's face in the flower
the instrumental poet hung on his strings
the colonies for the times they did not eat
I forgive the food of the armies
and the carpets under the general's feet
I forgive the poet for lying about god
I forgive god for tomorrow
I forgive the arisen prophet
the man who is a weapon
the weapon
death
the song
the singer dying in his song
even myself

Cold Pastoral

I thought someone said cathedral
        stature of gold
        emperor's bird
and eyes through shining hair.

I thought someone said drowning
        gather of weed
        swirling word
and shining eyes through water.

No one ever said ice
        blood
        wind
or eyes in the cadaver

Thief Hanging in Baptist Halls

After a Sculpture by George Wallace

Amid the congratulations of summer,
polite vegetation, deans, a presbyterian sun,
brick minds quaintly shaped in gothic and glass,
here where the poise and thrust of speech
gleams like polished teak
I did not expect to see myself.

But there he hangs
shrugging on his hung lines,
soft as a pulped fruit or bird
in his welded soft suit of steel.

I wish he would not shrug
and smile weakly at me
as if ashamed that he is hanging there,
his dean's suit fallen off, his leg cocked
as if to run
or (too weak, too tired, too undone)
to do what can be done
about his nakedness.

Why should he hang there,
my deanship, my insulting self, all undone?

Carleton University: January 1961

To George Johnston

Imagine a speaking rock: stone-dumb
mountains lean over Ottawa
but even the dumb stone spires
of Parliament Hill aspire to speech.

There is something raucous in Ottawa;
the P.M.'s speech is coarse,
brash the Privy Council's course
between Hull and the unspeakable Laurentians.

I think of a child's yell of pain
when he is speared by malicious tables,
explanation animate, mythical, fabulous,
and then of you, articulate climber,
bruised by stony syntax
on the mountains of Gawain's English.

How many beastly tables have you slain
where Carleton and its new cement
utter a few blue nouns and glassy verbs
between the howling trains and muzzled snow?

On Yonge Street

After Raymond Souster

seeing your head weave
        your cheeks twitch
        your shoulders jump
I wonder who hit you
        who do you hate

and who will you take on next
        at forty, the punch
        hard as before, reflexes
        quick, your eyes clear

don't you know they will get you
        in the ring or in some alley
        that they will break your mouth
that even the best go blind
        hear unevident birds

or do you care, dreaming of brutes
        buckled and crushed
        the great roar
and the white centre blind with light?

The Comedians

You might have expected music
But they move so slowly they make no sound.
Like swimmers they put their large hands
Up before their huge red mouths
As if to shove mountains of water
Inches over so they can breathe.

And yet you think you hear gasps,
Snuffling, muffled yelps, occasional
Screams when one wallops the other
Or with a paddle shuffles on his enormous feet
Toward his kneeling unsuspecting friend.

Sometimes in their drowning motions
They remove their arms and heads
And walk in their bodies like barrels.

No longer do I care for those critics
Who plead with me that Whitman is God.
As for that other poet, he was lying too.
Warmed by outlandish currents
I have begun to build an aquarium
Tolerant only for tropical fish
Who move like swimmers without sound
And nuzzle one another with their golden mouths.

Secret Flower

Sometimes you are a house
sometimes you unfold
ages and ages old
    you are sometimes
    a house with four rooms
    and four kings
    and four queens
secret flower
of my own design.

Deeper and more secret
darker and older
you unfold.

I have watched lovers
drop from your petals
into the room of kings
before the table of judges.

How can this be? It is Sunday.
My children are making paper men
no one has been poisoned
no one has been hung
there is even laughter in the room.

Darker and still more secret
older and unfolded
beyond my designing heart
beyond even my crying out
through your four rooms
past the hanging tree
beyond the swaying lovers
beyond the judges

who is that lying on the green carpet?
who is being carried on the stone tablet?
why do these gesture and posture before me?

I kneel before the four-armed god
gather up the shredded paper heads
and turn toward the suddenly open door.

The Damp Pilgrim

Was it the mouth?
The air around that castle stank of moat.
Westward a few pilgrims dragged along
Up to the steepled hill now steeped in sun
The growing shadows of their pointed hoods.
And damp inside, damp hung in mist,
Damp hung in ropes of froth along the walls.
I say the brilliant castle stank of moat.

It was in Holland or in Hungary.
The King collected all his furs, and still
He shivered, shook, and cursed the damp.
The Queen wept for her gems.
The pilgrims moved toward the steepled peak.

Clang! went the jester in the court.
He shook his mitred locks and rang
As hollow as a bell hung in a well.
Clang answered from the chains that hung below.

I would leave the court, leave hall, leave
Hollow echoing and damp and find some room
Gone yellow, dry, and dusty with old time
As parched and faded as the pages of my book.

Hippolytus

Lately I have been dreaming of horses

I have known mothers larger than boxcars
carrying the freight of years and wars
toward some stockyard of their minds
where they can count the slaughtered time

I too know something of punishment
there have been drownings even here
beside the dry reeds of the lakeless fields
hands have been held out to me
I dare not touch beside that unseen water
and once a beaten animal stumbled by
looking like someone's brother

easier then to praise
the strong in one another's arms
testing the machinery of love
the freight that moves the world's
horizons
everyone knows the rules
what to ignore, when and how to whip
the beaten and to bruise the animals

at the edge of these dark waters
hearing the drums of the world movers
again begins the sound of hoofs
I see the wet heaving horses of a last rain

House of Candy

Larches charred still leaning in the swamp,
I stumble here. What do I know of muskeg?
Woodsmen I have met in stories saved young girls.
It was the smoking hearts of casual rodents
They threw before the queen, her clouded eyes.

If I go forward to the blackened tower,
What must I learn about this offering?
How in my bloodless hands will I take blood
Or how appease the queen, her unencumbered arms?

Hunters darkened stare through sullen smoke
As if to see my shape where larches stand
Or find me in the smouldering stump of pine
Or like some candied house, a crystal rock,
Or marvellous and abstract in a cave,
All bearded whisper and prophetic eye.

They do not know how at the story's end,
Duller than prose, I turned toward the south,
Sought out the urgent maiden, warned her of the queen,
Then drove my knife into her heart to save a passing rat.

A Cage of Oats

To James Reaney and Jay Macpherson

How many prisons do I count?
Here is the wall I first ran from
and here there is a second wall,
the wall I ran against to flee
the first, and here there is a cage.

Inside the cage there is a second cage.
Inside the second cage there is a third.

Inside the third
there is a bird.

A Quaker holds a box of oats
on which a Quaker holds a box.
A mirror mirrors oats
for oats are mirrors of their crops
which farmer-quaker-man will thresh
and eat to put the seeds inside
the Quaker man who holds a box.

There may be stars inside of stones
(or other stones): inside of stars
there may be burning seeds.

What boxed bird so great
it can eat
stone, man, star and seed?

Cassandra

This has nothing to do with brothels.

Sometimes it seems my daughter or my wife
or my neighbour's wife, bright-eyed,
imitates an image out of sleep. They walk
as if I had dwindled, looking past me
toward unreasonable parliaments
crouching beside senatorial hills.

I have been practising this poetry in secret.
Also I have made advances toward pregnant women.
But there have been no unusual shadows,
all the swimming pools remain clear of blood,
and by the gates the watcher has not raised his arms.

To My Children

A rose grew in my head
My father lay dead
My mother fell among stones
Two flowers grew in my loins

I sing to my blossoming wife
My father is dead
My mother abandoned her life
Why should I lay down my head

Stony and brittle my days
My children sing psalms
The rabbis are ancient and wise
Blessed be my flowering names

Nude

I apologize to my children
for unplayed games, the Arthurs
I wasn't in the child's nighthood
poetry is a demanding art

sometimes I think I am a city
there is a steel furnace in my heart
trains rush up and down my arms
toward terminals where lovers meet
on the tips of my fingers
my head is a builder's project
full of unsold homes
                                        around my thighs
a garden of Boschian animals
carrying bedpans
                                  somewhere
(inside) loinward? Pancreatic?
Glandular as in brain or neck?
Anywhere there inside
watery and dismal
                                  a tremulous
fish and something utterly nude.

The Meaning of the I Ching

i

unopened
book of old men
orange-blossom book
before me
you were
how could you contain me?

do you not see I am the mouths
of telegraphs and cemeteries?
my mother groaned like the whole
of Western Union to deliver
my message
and yelling birthdays
that unrolled from my lungs
like ticker-tape for presidents
about to be murdered
I sped
on a line that flew
to the vanishing point of the west

before I was
you were
unopened book
do not craze me
with the odour of orange-blossom

do not sit there
like smiling old men

how could you contain me?

ii

under my fingers words form themselves
it's crazy to talk of temples in this day
but light brightens on my page
like today moving against the wooden house
all shapes change and yet stay
as if they were marble in autumn
as if in the marbled yellow autumn
each western house becomes a shrine
stiff against the age of days
under my fingers stiffly formed

I will walk in streets that vanish
noting peculiar elms like old women
who will crash under the storm of sun
that breaks elm, woman, man
into a crumble of stump and bark
until the air is once more clear
in the sane emptiness of fall

iii

my body speaks to me
as my arms say: two are one
as my feet say: earth upon earth
as my knees say: bow down, unhinge yourself
as my cells say: we repeat the unrepeatable

the book speaks: arrange yourself in the form
that will arrange you

before I was: colours that hurt me
arranged themselves in me

before I was: horizons that blind me
arranged themselves in me

before I was: the dead who speak to me
arranged themselves in me

iv

I am the mouths
of smiling old men

there rises from me
the scent of orange-blossoms

I speak in the words
of the ancient dead

arranged
in the raging sun
in the stiffening age of days

and in the temple of my house

The Milk of Paradise

1

Marvel upon marvel the berries of the sun
inflame the tumbling waters of my limbs
I am given to such visions: wide-eyed
luminous men walk through a hairy land
toward a milky glade where goats bleat

2

I put away this last unfinished poem
to think with trouble of a friend
who wrote me and whose words I scorned

Streetlights

they're not sunflowers
yet they burn on their stems
like the golden eyes of those other plants

and they bend
in such an iron complaint
toward the street's inverted sky

I'd like to think
they know as much of final things
as any living creature who endures the dark.

Woodbine

When a crooked man meets beauty
You think there'd be shouting in the streets

Believe me, I have gone about with pails on my head
so that my friends would recognize me

I wish there were no allegories
I wish the doctors could do something about my forked tongue

Lord, Lord, pollution everywhere
But I breathe still
                                        and breathless, sweet
woodbine, colour of honey, touches my skin
as if my unbelieving eyes made no difference at all

Signatures

In the eyes of lovers and mothers
gardens recently frighten me, grunts
from earth, deep growing things.
I think of Schweitzer dead at last,
his organs mutilated by those roots.
As for the tumult in the streets,
there are knives in water, in taps,
and once I took up from the tracks
beside the water-tower in my town
a huge beet, hairy and huge, that lay
in my hands like an under-water thing.

Thugs rampage. Marines draw down the head,
ancient and tight, her hair in ecstasy,
some Viet-Nam woman who had loved deeply
or who'd wept over her gunman son,
draw down into a pool that head
I've seen in paintings where there was no blood.

The room is alien: threats uttered
where only the print and I engage
our locked dialogue.
                                        Out of the blind
years, remotely, as in earth stirred
by slugs or worms, heaves a memory
of beets and roots; things unuttered
and unutterable, echoing out of print,
out of streams, a signature of rage.

Girl on a High Wire

Do you think I'd sit here staring
if I knew how to work a chair-lift
or lacked this odd taste for vertigo?

What if I dare you to jump, saying, ah
my hurt bird, I will catch you—
and if I weren't there (someone calling,
my son pointing at camels or wanting
to pee) when your eyes became horizons?
Or if you fell
into the well of bankers, mid-wives,
my brother-in-law, the Prudential Life
Insurance Company?
                                        I see them,
heroine, hefting you, their applause
ringing your head with the clatter of zircons,
mouths blowing little balloons of praise.

The great globe circles.
Soldiers fall into muddy rivers.
Boys walk the tightrope of their prison yard.

I can no longer look at telephone wires,
the vanishing point of your unfinished portrait.

I shall devote myself to entomology,
practise weight-lifting with dinky toys,
but who will keep me from my crooked prayers,
those mad doves that fling haloes around you?

Houdini

I suspect he knew that trunks are metaphors,
could distinguish between the finest rhythms
unrolled on rope or singing in a chain
and knew the metrics of the deepest pools

I think of him listening to the words
spoken by manacles, cells, handcuffs,
chests, hampers, roll-top desks, vaults,
especially the deep words spoken by coffins

escape, escape: quaint Harry in his suit
his chains, his desk, attached to all attachments
how he'd sweat in that precise struggle
with those binding words, wrapped around him
like that mannered style, his formal suit

and spoken when? by whom? What thing first said
"there's no way out?"; so that he'd free himself,
leap, squirm, no matter how, to chain himself again,
once more jump out of the deep alive
with all his chains singing around his feet
like the bound crowds who sigh, who sigh.

The Speaking Earth

grandfathers fall into it
their mighty beards muffled in grass

and admirals, the sea-sounding men

lovers fall into the earth
like rain on wet dark bodies

listen, our lady earth flowers
into the sea-green language
of grass and drowned admirals

listen: in bearded branches
clasped like broken hands
admiring birds
lovers singing of their kiss
before and after all the words

Listen, the Sea

yes what is
I'm learning

by your leave
leaving
          rising
to leave
          return
and turn
            we
deliberate
by the waves
rhythm casual
move
       tidal

as
   traffic

as
   the sea-women

neither are they
certain uncertain
but with us

within
        their song
here and
            hear
it is

Meditation on the Papyrus of Ani

sparrows discovering my eyes
leave me undisciplined

a trouble to my family

my soul, my indolent soul
why have you not learned the 66 names of god?

The Waggoner's Song

I've learned
                not to believe
in those hairy monks with their burning trees

                but that story
about the slain daughter
where we wept in one another's arms
that was good
                  now I know
something more about agony
                                        I know
perfection is a poem I never wrote

one about children
a tree
a curious bird
                 well, there are other songs

The Madness of Our Polity

I saw this. On the prairies where I lived
a boy who put a needle in a gopher's eye
knew more of civil law than all my friends.

What other emblem do you need?

Poem

Lately, the Chinese paintings on my wall
utter profanities
                    and yet, no Western man
has set his foot upon those hills
or muddied with his hands that silent waterfall.

The President and the Chairman Meet

when great men greet each other
with tea and wine and ceremony
small ones draw close
to guard themselves

On the Death of Ho Chi Minh

toward the end
he became frail as rice paper
his beard whispering thin ideograms

how unlike the great carved storm
that was Marx's face
                                        how unlike
the darkness and fury
in Beethoven's head
                                        scarcely
anything to be consumed

bombs destroy   destroy
but cannot touch his body now
or burn his poems

In the Fifty-seventh Century of Our Lord

semitic and secret I plan new evasions,
survival, the tribal rite
                                        to be
horribly chummy with god
as if he cared
                    in particular
about my politics
my plans for adultery
my marvellous scheme to blame it
on my neighbour's blameless wife

From the North Saskatchewan

when on the high bluff discovering
the river cuts below
                    send messages
we have spoken to those on the boats

I am obsessed by the berries they eat
all night odour of Saskatoon
and an unidentifiable odour
something baking
                    the sun
never reaches the lower bank

I cannot read the tree markings

today the sky is torn by wind:
a field after a long battle
strewn with corpses of cloud

give blessings to my children
speak for us to those who sent us here
say we did all that could be done
we have not learned
what lies north of the river
or past those hills that look like beasts

Letter to Be Opened Later

Tell them I did not vote Liberal
though I have taken bribes.
I want them to know that secretly
I admired the old red flag.

If they ask about our gods
explain I did pray to the angels
by all their right names:
                                        Mr. President
Your Worship, Dear Sir, Your Honour.

Listen:

I've told my analyst everything
except the bit about the girl student.

I don't know why the inspector threatens me
with letters rimmed in red.

Neither Here nor There

somewhere, I'm told, in fields darker than sleep
browse dreaming beasts with unhurt eyes
while walnut-coloured men in wind-swept voices
revolve their prayers as if they were wheels or stars

it isn't that way: one by one my poems fall apart
like a cooked onion
                                in the next house
a window opens once
                                    you wouldn't believe
what my blonde neighbour said
                                                  anyhow
next year the carnival will be bigger
they say they've got a real live junkie in a rage

The Anarchist-Poets

Step carefully through this rubble of words.
Can you really say which wrecks were once poems,
which weapons?
                    who once ran havoc
through these cities of language
scattering flowers of darkness,
black bursts of unmeaning?
                    what guerrillas
frantic for peace, love, home, nation,
government, even for death itself?

The Apology

I take back my apology:
                    the table the hassock were not moved
                    the radio opens its great ears
                    to assassinations, weathers, sinkings
                    but its four white eyes do not blink
                    its clock goes round
                    I want to connect with the radio
                    I want to put its plugs in my ears
                    and hear my throat announce that even
                    the Leafs are winning
                    I want the table to appreciate my
                    delight in its leaves: I will stand on
                    four legs and try hard to be wooden and
                    brown with folding leaves
                    I will fold and unfold my leaves
                        like a wooden butterfly
                    and birthday cards can be put on me
                    I will support birthday cards and letters
                    demanding rooms in hotels/   and typewriters
                    connecting tables and stars
I will love the light olive of the Olivetti
if necessary I will drink olive oil
I have no objection to becoming an olive myself
even in a martini

even a bugged martini
                    but though before my spread hands
                    though before the blessings and welcomes
                    in the fake Hebrew gestures I make to
                    the world
                    though my agony neither burns nor moves
                    tables and radios/ and my love does nothing
                    oh nothing to change them
I'm not going to apologize
I take back all the sorry clowns I tried to give you
(I will give them to you again, being a dream of Chaplin and
the short-haired girls who flicker in his hunch-backed gaze)
because you are not the table or radio
because you are not the idea of an olive or an olive
or an olive's idea of itself
because I can be tables but not you
and all the words fall hopelessly at your feet
like the bad idea of a plastic bouquet in hot weather
or the new kinds of toys which never quite fit in their parts
or that Zeppelin *Mad* magazine once tried to make me make
and it couldn't not only not fly it couldn't be put together
to fly though I managed the first three parts of a Voop
which is a great mouth and one foot and things hanging around
the mouth and foot
                  let me work hard at becoming tables or radios
                  I will be precise and they will continue
                  as if I weren't there at all

Psalm 24

What did you expect?
You, who drove me to mad alphabets
and taught me all the wrong words.

Isn't it enough that I've failed?

It's your scripture. You read it.

Hebraism

The law is the law and is
terribly Hebrew which is as you
know mostly poems about cooking
and meat to be cured in water and
salt and children to be counted
for pages of generation amid clean
and also unclean women

Pictures in an Institution

1

Notice: all mirrors will be covered
the mailman is forbidden to speak
professors are confined to their offices
faculties no longer exist.

2

I speak of what I know,
how uncle Asher, spittle on his lips,
first typed with harvest hands the fox
across a fence and showing all good men
come to their country's aid rushed off to Israel
there to brutalize his wife and son

how step-grandfather Barak wiped
sour curds out of his curly beard
before he roared the Sabbath in my ears
what Sara, long his widow, dreamed
the night she cried: God, let him die at last,
thinking perhaps of Josef who had lost
jewels in Russia where the Cossack rode
but coughed his stomach out in Winnipeg

Your boredom does not matter. I take,
brutal to my thoughts, these lives, defy
your taste in metaphor; the wind-break
on the farm that Barak plowed to dust
makes images would ruin public poetry.

The rites of love I knew:
how father cheated brother, uncle, son,
and bankrupt-grocer, that we might eat
wrote doggerel verse, later took his wife,
my mother, in the English way beside my bed.
Why would he put his Jewishness aside?
Because there was no bread?

Or out of spite
that doctors sliced his double rupture,
fingered spleen, and healed his bowel's ache?

Lovers lie down in glades, are glad.
These, now in graves, their headstones sunk,
knew nothing of such marvels, only God, his ways,
owning no texts of Greek or anthropology.

3

Notice: the library is closed to all who read
any student carrying a gun
registers first, exempt from fines,
is given thirteen books per month,
one course in science, one in math,
two options
campus police
will see to co-eds' underwear

4

These names I rehearse:
Eva, Isaac,
Charley, Yetta, Max
now dead
or dying or beyond my lies

till I reeling with messages
and sick to hold again their bitter lives
put them, with shame, into my poetry.

5

Notice: there will be no further communication
lectures are cancelled
all students are expelled
the reading of poetry is declared a public crime

News Item

man throws himself onto
Ottawa's eternal flame

suffers

superficial burns

(Toronto Star, Oct. 23, 1970)

First Political Speech

first, in the first place, to begin with, secondly,
in the second place, lastly

again, also, in the next place, once more, moreover,
furthermore, likewise, besides, similarly, for example,
for instance, another

then, nevertheless, still, however, at the same time,
yet, in spite of that, on the other hand, on the contrary

certainly, surely, doubtless, indeed, perhaps, possibly,
probably, anyway, in all probability, in all likelihood,
at all events, in any case

therefore, consequently, accordingly, thus, as a result,
in consequence of this, as might be expected

the foregoing, the preceding, as previously mentioned

as already stated

Transition Table
from *Learning to Write* by Ernest H. Winter (Second
Revised Edition) Macmillan (Toronto, 1961), p.156.

Manner of Suicide

hanging themselves
taking poison in the top of high trees
throwing themselves on swiftly revolving circular saws
exploding dynamite in their mouths
thrusting red hot pokers down their throats
hugging red hot stoves
freezing to death on piles of ice
in refrigerator cars
lacerating their throats on barbed wire fences
drowning themselves head downwards in barrels
suffocating themselves head downwards in chimneys
diving into white-hot coke ovens
throwing themselves into craters of volcanoes
shooting themselves with ingenious combinations of
a rifle and a sewing machine
strangling themselves with their hair
swallowing poisonous spiders
piercing their hearts with corkscrews and
darning needles
cutting their throats with handsaws and sheepshears
hanging themselves with grape vines
swallowing strips of underclothing and buckles
of suspenders
forcing teams of horses to tear their heads off
drowning themselves in vats of soft soap
plunging into retorts of molten glass
jumping into slaughter-house tanks of blood
decapitation with homemade guillotines
self-crucifixion

Man Against Himself, Karl Menninger, *passim.*

Narrative Poem

the point is
the story
that
one no one
told

and yet
cattle
on lean flanked
land leaning
toward plain

and yet
shacks
coal fire
despair
the
barbed wire
wolf willow
river rice

but never
a third act
plotting

end or
even

beginning

land
and long
land
and
land

Praise

even the smallest room
defines
        how we might be
without enclosing space

I praise
        private
secret touching

Estevan, 1934

remembering the family we
called breeds   the Roques
their house smelling of urine
my mother's prayers before
the dried fish she cursed
them for their dirtiness their
women I remember too
                                        how
seldom they spoke and
they touched one another

even when the sun killed
cattle and rabbis
                            even
in the poisoned slow air
like hunters
                    like lizards
they touched   stone
they touched
                            earth

Edmonton, 1967

as if by Colville
I mean "hard edge"
stucco   white wall
gravel &
legs
in one direction shadows
leaning & midget
above the pavement narrows
rapid as the river
everything
disappears
neatness: axiomatic
houses   here
now gone
"You are impatient
with poetry" my friend writes
from Iceland

Oil Refineries: Edmonton

squat
(are)
and there
fraction-
ary silver re-
flections flat
distillation
(silver) in
flat
eye
pulled side-
ways a slit in
the mind (&) all

a line   against   some
poem
not   there

At Wabamun the Calgary Power Station

leans white in the moon
light puts white slabs up
light shanty whiteness leans

as if it owned the land

daytime horses crop grass
unknowing transformers hum

transformers   at the word
it takes on fiery hair
blazing it transmits
messages furious and hairy
it sends and receives from stars
ancient planets   people
who speak like horses new words

then sparks perform dead
parabolas and loops die
fireplace quietens it is
morning it is light only
the power the power hums

and the lake grows green
again in sunlight
                    it is
morning algae and weeds
thicken
          the green lake
wobbles
          we look at
each other   alien forms

From "Wabamun"

1

lake
    holds
        sun   moon   stars

      trees
         hold

stars   moon   sun

2

only
    waves   motion
    sun   dancing

no sun

only
      light
hurting
in its
    endless
dance

3

on water
many suns
        here there
fires   then
silent comedians
perch jumping

gulls

4

each day I
step
farther
into dark water

once I will
know
no longer
whether
that one
floating
is myself
or the light
one
standing
on the red
pier

5

to have come to this

simplicity

to know

only

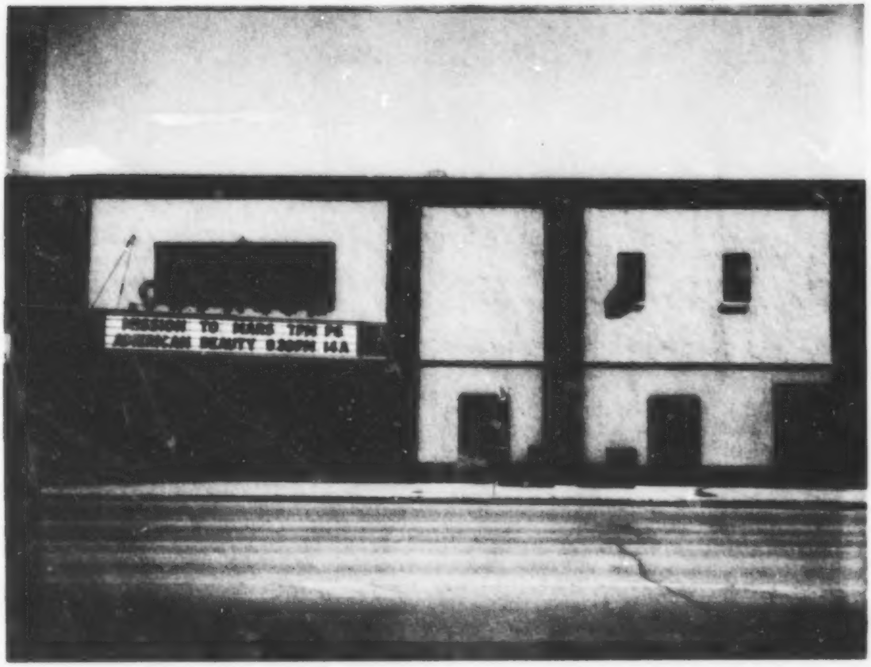
the absolute

calm
lake

before

night

DREAMING BACKWARDS


MISSION TO MARS 7PM PG
AMERICAN BEAUTY 9:20PM 14A

It is from the *Dreaming Back* of the dead, though not from that of persons associated with our past, that we get the imagery of ordinary sleep. Much of the dream's confusion comes from the fact that the image belongs to some unknown person.… "We have no power," said an inhabitant [of the spirit state], "except to purify our intention," and when I asked of what, replied: "Of complexity."

W. B. Yeats, *A Vision*

from *Trio*

Minotaur Poems

I

It has been hours in these rooms,
the opening to which, door or sash,
I have lost. I have gone from room to room
asking the janitors who were sweeping up
the brains that lay on the floors,
the bones shining in the wastebaskets,
and once I asked a suit of clothes
that collapsed at my breath and bundled
and crawled on the floor like a coward.
Finally, after several stories,
in the staired and eyed hall,
I came upon a man with the face of a bull.

II

My father was always out in the garage
building a shining wing, a wing
that curved and flew along the edge of blue air
in that streamed and sunlit room
that smelled of oil and engines
and crankcase grease, and especially
the lemon smell of polish and cedar.
Outside there were sharp rocks, and trees,
cold air where birds fell like rocks
and screams, hawks, kites, and cranes.
The air was filled with a buzzing and flying
and the invisible hum of a bee's wings was honey
in my father's framed and engined mind.
Last Saturday we saw him at the horizon
screaming like a hawk as he fell into the sun.

III

They chose among us in the fall of the year,
by lot, behind fierce masks designed of sign
to ward off the imminent descent of the sun people;
someone talked of a dying god, as if
the young ones among us believed in that
any more, others cautioned us against the voices
we were always supposed to hear and these
were stubborn about the women crying.
I remembered the face of the one who brought me here
when they drew my name in the hall,
it was her persuasions in the beginning,
something about fathers.
                                        Like the others, before this
I saw only their breasts that appeared on the walls,
legs moving in unison, the swaying of sweat-stained
bodies and their half closed eyes:
all the talk about signs when I knew
the boys were only waiting for the time
when the women undressed, as they always did,
                                        snickering
in those same fields that make a dawn in vision
where birds begin to live in rocks and screams.
It is hard to feel free of accusation
because of eyes
although there is a difference between revelation
and action bellied into life, between
believing in voices
and knowing the chances that we have to take.

IV

Now I am dressed in a multitude of rooms
like a Chinese box, and slip from covers
into covers   Dawn will not help me nor
the day's exposure   I am a prodigious pun
to hide and show myself between these walls
this otherwise where sunlight
dressed in a tweed suit pursues me
or a stranger in the rooms
        and footfalls on the stairs
and eyes   and over all
   the whispering and chattering of the walls
      the pipes and hammered arteries of the place.

Is that a revelation in a field of light
competing with a shadow on the rock?
A bird's shadow seen from here?
Or a cloud between the sky and land
footed and patterned into phrases?

It is hours since I have been in here.
If I had once seen anything
except birds,
rocks, land, and all winter long
                        the ice and snow.

V

Within these walls I am to look for light
Or hold an abstract in my hand as firm
As apples or the golden bar the older men
Returned to us. Remember that. That spring
There were those crowds and crowds below the cliffs
This side of town and all along the beach,
Flags out, booths filled with toys, and one,
The better salesman of the lot, a beggar
From the north had miniatures of bars
That went like hotcakes. Fleece for the crowd.
A replica to keep you as it kept our men
This winter past. Then noise, flocks wheeling overhead,
The painted ship, a bauble on the sea, came like a toy
To harbour.

And the tall bronzed men descended
Between the cheers and speeches at the harbour mouth,
Talk about campaigns in lands we'd never heard of,
Cheers and lewd remarks and laughter, the look
In other eyes, and counting of the crew
And stooping at the gaps aghast.
That was another death, the shock in surf,
The rock's point of view, the hawk
Momentarily composing before the fall
His target of a landscape from the sky.
The trailing plume before the dark.
Night on the beach and smoke
from the new charred campfires.

VI

Orpheus

The Welshman by the pit whose Sabbath voice
Would set the week to peace, or end a day,
Picked over coal and said he knew within
The inside of our god, his transformation
Out of tree, the face in black, faced out of coal,
Stamped on the walls he picked his useful metaphor,
He said, the pit shaped underneath him in black
And pitied words that moved the leaves or sang
Together flocks, or shook the dull and herded animals.
His pity also took between the rocks
Some still alive who saw the black and second
Hand that clawed them, and he mocked in Welsh
Whatever shades fell back, and cursed and sang
Back to their second death those grave ghosts.

Who found his body and who found his head
And who wiped god from off his eyes and face?

Estevan Saskatchewan

A small town bears the mark of Cain,
Or the oldest brother with the dead king's wife
In a foul relation as viewed by sons,
Lies on the land, squat, producing
Love's queer offspring only,
Which issue drives the young
To feign a summer madness, consort with skulls,
While the farmer's chorus, a Greek harbinger,
Forecasts by frost or rings about the moon
How ill and black the seeds will grow.

This goodly frame, the earth, each of its sons,
With nature as a text, and common theme
The death of fathers, anguished in betrayal
From the first family returns a sacrifice
Of blood's brother, a splintered eyeball
Groined in the fields, scarecrow to crows.
This warns Ophelia to her morning song,
Bawdy as a lyric in a pretty brain gone bad,
While on those fields the stupid harvest lies.

from *Fuseli Poems*

Notes from the Underground

A woman built herself a cave
    and furnished it with torn machines
    and tree-shaped trunks and dictionaries.
Out of the town where she sprang
    to her cave of rusting texts and springs
    rushed fables of indifferent rape
    and children slain indifferently
    and daily blood.

Would you believe how free I have become
    with lusting after her?
                                That I have become
    a melodramatist, my friends ashamed?

I have seen by the light of her burning texts
    how the indifferent blood drips
    from the brass mouths of my friends,
    how at the same table I have supped
    and grown fat.

Her breasts are planets in a reedy slough.
Lie down beside that slough awhile
    and taste the bitter reeds.

Read in the water how a drowning man
    sings of a free green life.

Ducks in a Pond

1

Hairy and huge, old sun stood
up to his neck in a slough
and ever from his coronal arm
coins to mallards he threw
and mallards in a spume of mire
leaped to the touch of web and fire.

2

One must have a cold, reedy skin
(touching this question of fire)
to tread out a froth of zeal
under the armpits of the hairy wheel
under the arm of the sweating sun
to maunder in a slough of sweat
a skin of water touched by fire.

3

About the death of ducks in ice
I know nothing, but mallards know
of Franklin underfoot, his men
on Boothia and their frozen dance
in snowy froth that stoned the eye,
the sun a cataract in a blinding day.

4

The zeal of ducks for noise
(touching this question of fire)
is not the music that I hoped to hear
(Isaiah's coal, the final choir)
but poise of mallards in a pool
as in the pupil of an eye where fire
burned on water seems a pose of praise
sufficient for the gabble of my days.

Palisade of Images

Stevens being dead: 75 - 3/8/55
I owe him this
                    "just one more truth, one more
Element in the immense disorder of truths."
                                        not pastoral
                                        nothing for Dylan
                                        done in early
that great hospital gong silent and the tongue
a useless clapper in the bell
but for a better arrangement
a kind of insurance against doubt

arranging bees honeycomb feeling
into wax
into box
and sweetness crumbles on the tongue
to merely crystal, the calligraphy of taste

or the iconographic fly, perpetual puritan,
                              imagines on carcasses
                              clean blue colonies
and at the shudder of my step
dissolves society, is stinking fly

well, Wallace has his clean eternal order now
clatter of card-sorting in his office for his poem
stamps him
flips him
into a strong box, honeycomb of unlettered cards

perhaps the Great Bear feeds on such papery dew
his paw inside the blighted log of Time
perhaps ants and flies from all the centuries
run out of it over his hairy chest
I write this in hot August, my room
palisaded with images
                         of bees
                         of flies
of cardboard Stevens in his honeycomb of lies.

Two Part Exercise on a Single Image

I

I come into the desolation
Of this calm September town
Which slants out of morning
Into the wild disaster of sunlight,
And I see that my street is a tree
Split into a thousand sentences
Any one of which can hang me.
Birds in that tree utter phrases
Which are pebbles of glass that flow
Into the light of a river,
And the paned mirror of the river
Gives up the restless image
Of a man walking down slanting streets
Like corridors in "Blood of a Poet."
The sun shatters my tree
In a wind of light
Into a torch in the unexplained
Interior, luminous with volcanoes,
Dark fig trees, and the white
Hunched question mark of a polar bear.

II

You think it is easy? A matter of words?
And wonder that I'm a poor speller?
Let me tell you this has nothing to do
With teaching or even the love of poetry.
It is the calamity of an eyesore, a stye,
A social disaster. Look for once
At the real, ridiculous humped self
Crouched in the unexplained interior.
See it looming in the light
Of exploding volcanoes and dark fig trees
Like the hunched white question mark
Of a polar bear.
Oh my friend, I too like company
And have ambitions in business.

Acis

There was her message. Suddenly
His blood had turned to water.
She looked into his eyes and saw
They swam, no shore behind them,
Looking toward the green and lighted sea,
A fish-like stare, a dolphin memory.

City Park Merry-Go-Round

Freedom is seldom what you now believe.
Mostly you circle round and round the park:
Night follows day, these horses never leave.

Like children, love whatever you conceive,
See then our world as lights whirled in the dark.
Freedom is seldom what you now believe.

Your world moves up and down or seems to weave
And still you pass you pass the same ringed mark.
Night follows day, these horses never leave.

You thought your past was here, you might retrieve
That wild illusion whirling in the dark.
Freedom is seldom what you now believe.

Sick on that circle you begin to grieve.
You wish the ride would end you could escape the park.
Night follows day, these horses never leave.

Mostly you circle round and round the park.
You'd give your life now to be free to leave.
Freedom is seldom what you now believe.
Night follows day, theses horses never leave.

Pillar of Fire

A man came to my tent door
in the heat of the day, the tent
stretched and slapped in the wind.
All the guy ropes went taut
And I felt my temples stretch
and throb in the noise and heat.

He talked about blowflies,
plague among the swollen cattle.
He asked about the children.
"You are a great nation.
Will you stay here long?"

That night the fire in the tent
vomited a great smoke.
The tent glowed like a furnace.
I dreamt about Egypt and its flies,
a priest dying of cancer.
I am told to breed more children,
try not to think about politics,
remember the Sabbath and my enemies.

Palinode

I don't suppose that poems can be made
Of private shame, or shame, or sham
Excesses of the spirit. Modest Locke
Once closed the door to godliness
And in his shaded room saw nothing
Of the wide, bruised sky of spring
Wrapped in its bandages of cloud,
And said, the underbrush is thick,
Until we've hacked a way through it
We cannot know the shape of huge,
Deformed and practical Despair
Prowling in the woods beside his lair
Heaped with the bones of gay adventurers.

I say that it was spring, and it was then
As if with prison bars the ruler sun
Had strictly lined the air, as if
A kind of Dali plain, empty of bush,
Stretched out, as if the first ants
Of the year crawled on the wound
That lipped the iodine-stained sky,
And it was then I saw that private men
Were dragging loads of bone and flesh
In sackfuls to the edges of the plain.
I cried to stop it, saying, God, you know,
Inhabits each man's breast. Look at the sky,
The sun is Blake in excess of his glory
Come to clothe the naked twigs, and looked
And saw the drop of blood that hangs there
And saw it run and spread and soak the men
And saw it seeping, in the spring, out of those sacks.

Prologue

I think it was burned on. And the smell.
No one would go near it for days after it appeared.
There was hell to pay in the council, everyone
Dredged muck out of the past. The mayor quit.

They tried whitewash. See it anyhow, blacker
Than sin on Sunday. Tried burning. Smoke choked
The town for days, and the fence was still there.

Bees swarmed, honey of smoke, out of the old
Witch tree and got into the kitchen chimney,
Stung the cook and she quit too.
Slop all over the wall where she threw the pail.
The air was blue with bees and words.

Preacher says,
Hell fire aint good enough.
Preacher says,
It burns and it aint burned.
Kind of like drought. The day's coming.
The fine critter bouncing on the hill
Aint the same when she's laid low.
Skinned she's awful.
Like the insides of a calving cow.

And you cant blow the spots off a leopard anyhow.

Doll on the Mantelpiece

Here on the mantel where a Dresden doll
Looks into a frozen german hill
All is still, chill, white,
Except the red stain on her lips,
The blood of colour there.

She is poised for a dance above the fire,
A hand out for a partner neither here
Nor anywhere. The fire breathes below
A savage noise of wood and she looks out
Over the white hill, still as a doll,
Chill in her world of ivory.

Why do I think of clowns, of emperors,
Of Nietzsche in his tower and all Berlin
Falling in flames while this silly doll
Stands on a fire, calm beside a frozen hill?

Epilogue

When our mayor was put out to eat grass
And on the street manholes opened like eyes,
Everyone said it had come from below
Because the street was nervous, empty,
And the sewers rumbled for days, the wires
Sang in the high wind and cracks appeared
In the gray cement like folds in an elephant's hide.

Everyone said it had come from below
Because the banks toppled over like great gods
And fire flamed out of the mouth of the stock exchange,
And our bird-like mayor, like a hoofed thing,
Galloped away to the green fields in the country.

from *Black and Secret Man*

Charles Isaac Mandel

Those uplands of the suburban mind,
sunlit, where dwell the lithe ironists,
athletic as greeks, boy-lovers,
mathematical in love as in science.
Formalists. What have I to do with them?
I gather the few relics of my father:
his soiled Tallis, his Tefillin,
the strict black leather of his dark faith.

Day of Atonement: Standing

My Lord, how stands it with me now
who, standing here before you
(who, fierce as you are, are also just),
cannot bow down. You order this.
Why, therefore, I must break
if bend I will not, yet bend I must.

But I address myself to you thus,
covered and alert, and will not bare
my self. Then I must bear you,
heavy as you are.
                    This is the time
the bare tree bends in the fierce wind
and stripped, my God, springs to the sky.

Secret Flower

Sometimes you are a house
sometimes you unfold
ages and ages old
    you are sometimes
    a house with four rooms
    and four kings
    and four queens
secret flower
of my own design.

Deeper and more secret
darker and older
you unfold.

I have watched lovers
drop from your petals
into the room of kings
before the table of judges.

How can this be? It is Sunday.
My children are making paper men
no one has been poisoned
no one has been hung
there is even laughter in the room.

Darker and still more secret
older and unfolded
beyond my designing heart
beyond even my crying out
through your four rooms
past the hanging tree
beyond the swaying lovers
beyond the judges

who is that lying on the green carpet?
who is being carried on the stone tablet?
why do these gesture and posture before me?

I kneel before the four-armed god
gather up the shredded paper heads
and turn toward the suddenly open door.

There Is No One Here Except Us Comedians

1

In what we call dreams I see
a fairground of wheels inside wheels
where I am turned into nobody
nobody's son nobody's daughter

and orphanages
where children
drag toward iron gates yellow dolls
and huge rolling balls
made in the shape of towering fathers

2

I pray nightly for release
I ask of a door shaped like a bat
to fly away with me
I want to be in a wheatfield
stupid as grain yellowing in the sun
I want to be something like a bird,
part reptile, able to stare blankly
for minutes
    at the jade trees
    at the jewelled grass
    the crystal city

whispering blasphemy
I want to walk over the doors of the city
my bird feet tinkling at keyholes

I want you to know I am innocent
I want you to open the last door
into the field of orphan wheat
the orient grain the green golden corn

David

all day the gopher-killing boys
  their sling-shot arms
    their gopher-cries

the king insisting
  my poetry must stop

I have written nothing since May

instead
          walk among the boys
gopher-blood on their stretched
hands
        murder will end murder
the saying goes, someone must
do something about the rodents
and poems do not:
                              even the doctors
admit that it's plague
ask me about my arms
                     look
at my shadow hanging
  like a slingshot

the world turns like a murderous stone
  my forehead aching with stars

Hebraism

  The law is the law and is
terribly Hebrew which is as you
know mostly poems about cooking
and meat to be cured in water and
salt and children to be counted
for pages of generation amid clean
  and also unclean women

A Cage of Oats

To James Reaney and Jay Macpherson

How many prisons do I count?
Here is the wall I first ran from
and here there is a second wall,
the wall I ran against to flee
the first, and here there is a cage.

Inside the cage there is a second cage.
Inside the second cage there is a third.

Inside the third
there is a bird.

A Quaker holds a box of oats
on which a Quaker holds a box.
A mirror mirrors oats
for oats are mirrors of their crops
which farmer-quaker-man will thresh
and eat to put the seeds inside
the Quaker man who holds a box.

There may be stars inside of stones
(or other stones): inside of stars
there may be burning seeds.

What boxed bird so great
it can eat
stone, man, star and seed?

Departure

There was merely a brief note:
"Have seen Edmonton
am leaving at once."
                    I think:
it must have been the buildings
or perhaps the art gallery
or even the university.

But his friends tell me
he had no ambition
his children were slovenly
recently he recovered from a strange disease
he no longer knows what numbers are
nor understands the language spoken here.

Cassandra

This has nothing to do with brothels.

Sometimes it seems my daughter or my wife
or my neighbour's wife, bright-eyed,
imitates an image out of sleep. They walk
as if I had dwindled, looking past me
toward unreasonable parliaments
crouching beside senatorial hills.

I have been practising this poetry in secret.
Also I have made advances toward pregnant women.
But there have been no unusual shadows,
all the swimming pools remain clear of blood,
and by the gates the watcher has not raised his arms.

Rapunzel

Girl in a Tower

Another one of those puzzles
there's not a farmer
skinny as a gold seed
tough as a nutcracker
can plough or crack.

How do towers grow like that?
Overnight: the garden
a green sky, its moon
like beet, its sun
a turnip underground?

Many girls lock themselves up,
become pantries, closets.
Some, like trees, grow bark,
and others, like rivers,
burble into dimpled pools.

But they are not these crooked
wicked towers, not rooms
inside of rooms, not brooms
to thrash out of a seedy man
his golden crop and garden.

I lean on a ladder of hair,
remember the right rhymes,
look up at the green head,
climb toward the turnip-colour sun.

To My Children

A rose grew in my head
My father lay dead
My mother fell among stones
Two flowers grew in my loins

I sing to my blossoming wife
My father is dead
My mother abandoned her life
Why should I lay down my head

Stony and brittle my days
My children sing psalms
The rabbis are ancient and wise
Blessed by my flowering names

from *An Idiot Joy*

The Meaning of the I CHING

i

unopened
        book of old men
        orange-blossom book
                                before me
you were
        how could you contain me?

do you not see I am the mouths
of telegraphs and cemeteries?
my mother groaned like the whole
of Western Union to deliver
my message
          and yelling birthdays
that unrolled from my lungs
like ticker-tape for presidents
about to be murdered
                    I sped
on a line that flew
to the vanishing point of the west

before I was
          you were
unopened book
            do not craze me
with the odour of orange-blossom

do not sit there
like smiling old men

        how could you contain me?

ii

under my fingers words form themselves
it's crazy to talk of temples in this day
but light brightens on my page
today moving against the wooden house
all shapes change yet stay
as if they were marble in autumn
as if in the marbled yellow autumn
each western house becomes a shrine
stiff against the age of days
under my fingers stiffly formed

one cannot be another, I cry,

I will walk in streets that vanish
noting peculiar elms like old women
who will crash under the storm of sun
that breaks elm, woman, man
into a crumble of stump and bark
until the air is once more clear
in the sane emptiness of fall

iii

my body speaks to me	
as my arms say:	two are one
as my feet say:	earth upon earth
as my knees say:	bow down, unhinge yourself
as my cells say:	we repeat the unrepeatable
the book speaks:	arrange yourself in the form that will arrange you
before I was:	colours that hurt me arranged themselves in me
before I was:	horizons that blind me arranged themselves in me
before I was:	the dead who speak to me arranged themselves in me

iv

I am the mouths
of smiling old men

there rises from me
the scent of orange-blossoms

I speak in the words
of the ancient dead

arranged
in the raging sun
in the stiffening age of days

and in the temple of my house

one becomes another

The Milk of Paradise

1

Marvel upon marvel the berries of the sun
inflame the tumbling waters of my limbs
I am given to such visions: wide-eyed
luminous men walk through a hairy land
toward a milky glade where goats bleat

2

I put away this last unfinished poem
to think with trouble of a friend
who wrote me and whose words I scorned

Streetlights

they're not sunflowers
yet they burn on their stems
like the golden eyes of those other plants

and they bend
in such an iron complaint
toward the street's inverted sky

I'd like to think
they know as much of final things
as any living creature who endures the dark.

The Trance of Poetry

My children frightened, I quarrel with my wife,
And all that passes through my raging mind,
This poem I must write
                    lovers, entranced,
Will whisper mouth to mouth my lines

I put the difficulty down to god
Who failed to be unambiguous in such matters

In the Fifty-seventh Century of Our Lord

semitic and secret I plan new evasions,
survival, the tribal rite
                    to be
horribly chummy with god
as if he cared
            in particular
about my politics
my plans for adultery
my marvellous scheme to blame it
on my neighbour's blameless wife

Girl on a High Wire

Do you think I'd sit here staring
if I knew how to invent chair-lifts
or lacked this odd taste for vertigo?

What if I dare you to jump, saying, ah
my hurt bird, I will catch you—
and if I weren't there (someone calling,
my son pointing at camels or wanting
to pee) when your eyes became horizons?
Or if you fell
into the well of bankers, mid-wives,
my brother-in-law, the Prudential Life
Insurance Company?
                                        I see them,
heroine, hefting you, their applause
ringing your head with the clatter of zircons,
mouths blowing little balloons of praise.

The great globe circles.
Soldiers fall into muddy rivers.
Boys walk the tightrope of their prison yard.

I can no longer look at telephone wires,
the vanishing point of your unfinished portrait.

I shall devote myself to entomology,
practise weight-lifting with dinky toys,
but who will keep me from my crooked prayers,
those mad doves that fling haloes around you?

Houdini

I suspect he knew that trunks are metaphors,
could distinguish between the finest rhythms
unrolled on rope or singing in a chain
and knew the metrics of the deepest pools

I think of him listening to the words
spoken by manacles, cells, handcuffs,
chests, hampers, roll-top desks, vaults,
especially the deep words spoken by coffins

escape, escape: quaint Harry in his suit
his chains, his desk, attached to all attachments
how he'd sweat in that precise struggle
with those binding words, wrapped around him
like that mannered style, his formal suit

and spoken when? by whom? What thing first said
"there's no way out?"; so that he'd free himself,
leap, squirm, no matter how, to chain himself again,
once more jump out of the deep alive
with all his chains singing around his feet
like the bound crowds who sigh, who sigh.

The Silences

1

like a blank page
                    unused
I could write anything:
everything
              you've no
way of knowing what
I might say
                think
what whispers
before any word spoken

think
       all is possible
do you dare
think of the possible silences?

2

the marvellous gods are silent
their wide eyes baffle us

we cannot read their eyes
their impractical calm gestures

in the remote hills
they walk
             noiseless
their footsteps

3

before the possibility
it was impossible

syllables
            I think of your mouth

4

throttles splendid utterance
the unspoken

gathers in harvests

5

when he put out his eyes
he said: I have said everything

you will not hear my voice again

6

what I said became

7

a letter: don't read this
so that what I've said
might not become
                                        anyhow
let us perplex our hearts
with uselessness

8

think only of the unwritten
all
   a shrine
            of possible

            silences

Manner of Suicide

Man, says Menninger, against himself:

"hanging themselves
taking poison in the top of high trees
throwing themselves on swiftly revolving circular saws
exploding dynamite in their mouths
thrusting red hot pokers down their throats
hugging red hot stoves
freezing to death on piles of ice
in refrigerator cars
lacerating their throats on barbed wire fences
drowning themselves head downwards in barrels
suffocating themselves head downwards in chimneys
diving into white-hot coke ovens
throwing themselves into craters of volcanoes
shooting themselves with ingenious combinations
of a rifle and a sewing machine
strangling themselves with their hair
swallowing poisonous spiders
piercing their hearts with corkscrews and
darning needles
cutting their throats with handsaws and sheepshears
hanging themselves with grape vines
swallowing strips of underclothing and buckles
of suspenders
forcing teams of horses to tear their heads off
drowning themselves in vats of soft soap
plunging into retorts of molten glass
jumping into slaughter-house tanks of blood
decapitation with homemade guillotines
self-crucifixion"
"the archaic symbolism of the psychotic"
"The Cremation of Sam McGee"
"the undisturbed bliss of inter-uterine
  existence illustrated by fantasies in
  the Bible, poetry, casual conversation
  of the man on the street, the church hymnal,
  newspapers, patients, the writings of Shelley
  and Freud"

EVENING SERVICE FOR THE SABBATH: THANKSGIVING FOR GOD'S UNFAILING MERCIES:

> We will give thanks unto Thee and declare
> Thy praise for our lives which are committed
> unto Thy hand, and for our souls which are in
> Thy charge, and for Thy miracles which are
> daily with us, and for Thy wonders and Thy
> benefits, which are wrought at all times,
> evening, morn, and noon.

Woodbine

When a crooked man meets beauty
You think there'd be shouting in the streets

I wish there were no allegories
I wish the doctors could do something about my forked tongue

Believe me, I have gone about with pails on my head
so that my friends would recognize me.

Lord, Lord, pollution everywhere
But I breathe still
                              and breathless, sweet
woodbine, colour of honey, touches my skin
as if my unbelieving eyes made no difference at all

House of Candy

Larches charred still leaning in the swamp,
I stumble here. What do I know of muskeg?
Woodsmen I have met in stories saved young girls.
It was the smoking hearts of casual rodents
They threw before the queen, her clouded eyes.

If I go forward to the blackened tower,
What must I learn about this offering?
How in my bloodless hands will I take blood
Or how appease the queen, her unencumbered arms?

Hunters darkened stare through sullen smoke
As if to see my shape where larches stand
Or find me in the smouldering stump of pine
Or like some candied house, a crystal rock,
Or marvellous and abstract in a cave,
All bearded whisper and prophetic eye.

They do not know how at the story's end,
Duller than prose, I turned toward the south,
Sought out the urgent maiden, warned her of the queen,
Then drove my knife into her heart to save a passing rat.

The Speaking Earth

grandfathers fall into it
their mighty beards muffled in grass

and admirals, the sea-sounding men

lovers fall into the earth
like rain on wet dark bodies

listen, our lady earth flowers
into the sea-green language
of grass and drowned admirals

listen: in bearded branches
clasped like broken hands
admiring birds
lovers singing of their kiss
before and after all the words

From the North Saskatchewan

when on the high bluff discovering
the river cuts below
                                        send messages
we have spoken to those on the boats

I am obsessed by the berries they eat
all night odour of Saskatoon
and an unidentifiable odour
something baking
                                  the sun
never reaches the lower bank

I cannot read the tree markings
today the sky is torn by wind:
a field after a long battle
strewn with corpses of cloud

give blessings to my children
speak for us to those who sent us here
say we did all that could be done
we have not learned
what lies north of the river
or past those hills that look like beasts

The Moon in All Her Phases

I'd say, in the old manner:
she imagines our existence,
its changes, illusions

well, luminous times are gone
most of my friends quarrel
drink
        are not, though satyrs,
lordly
          recently one in rage
told me he loved the first war
because they sang such songs

we grope toward each other
hands fumble among clothes

I cant remember:
                                did your eyes
your body glow?
                                I cant remember
the difficult lovely words.

Listen, the Sea

yes what is
I'm learning

by your leave
leaving
          rising
to leave
          return
and turn
          we
deliberate
by the waves
rhythm casual
move
       tidal
as
       traffic
as
   the sea-women

neither are they
certain uncertain
but with us
            withal
within
       their song
here
     oh hear
it is

Marina

Because she spoke often of the sea we thought she had
known another country, her people distant, not
forgotten

We did not know then who was calling her or what songs
she listened to or why the sea-birds came to rest
upon her long fingers

Or why she would shudder like a sea-bird about to take
flight, her eyes changing with the changing light

As the sea-changing opal changes, as a shell takes its
colours from the sea as if it were the sea

As if the great sea itself were held in the palm of your hand

They say the daughters of the sea know the language of birds,
that in their restless eyes the most fortunate learn
how the moon rises and sets

We do not know who is calling her or why her eyes change
or what shore she will set her foot upon

from *Stony Plain*

Wabamun

1

lake
holds
sun moon stars

trees
hold

stars moon sun

2

thunder
and sky
towel
wet sand
in yellow light

yesterday

3

on water
many suns
here there
fires then
silent comedians
gulls
perch jumping

4

only
waves motion
sun dancing

no sun

only
light
hurting
in its
endless
dance

5

each day I
step
farther
into dark water

once I will
know
no longer

whether
that one
floating
is myself
or the light
one
standing
on the red
pier

6

moon train on causeway

coal cars

            a white moon

7

to have come to this
simplicity
            to know
only
      the absolute
calm
       lake

       before

       night

8

clover   smell
sweet stars in a green sky

white sweet stars
blossom in a green sky

clover   stars
in a white sky

white
       stars

At Wabamun the Calgary Power Station

leans white in the moon
light puts white slabs up
light shanty whiteness leans

as if it owned the land

daytime horses crop grass
unknowing transformers hum

transformers at the word
it takes on fiery hair
blazing it transmits
messages furious and hairy
it sends and receives from stars
ancient planets   people
who speak like horses new words

then sparks perform dead
parabolas and loops die
fireplace quietens it is
morning it is light only
the power the power hums

and the lake grows green
again in sunlight

                                        it is
morning algae and weeds
thicken
                the green lake
wobbles
                  we look at
each other   alien forms

Edmonton, 1967

as if by Colville
I mean "hard edge"
stucco   white wall
gravel &
          legs
in one direction shadows
leaning midget
above the pavement narrows
rapid as the river
                    everything
disappears
              neatness: axiomatic
              houses   here
now gone
            "You are impatient
with poetry" my friend writes
from Iceland

Two Dream Songs for John Berryman

1

Henry, it says to me here
you took yourself to a bridge.
And you, weary and wavery,
walked, bone and brain, all
to the rail
there perched
waved farewell from rail

Is that how it was done?

Is it only possible to live
how we have done backwards
dreaming our way from death to
bony life?
Well, it was gaily
done
but, here on the coast of Spain,
heartsick like you
and hurt too
by burning poems that will not write
themselves I
say
now fare-you-well
with Sylvia, Ted, Randall,
and all your hurt friends,

God notwithstanding

2

It is done but not done well
Henry to betake yourself to ice
and death in a Minnesota morning

or a bruise
throwing yourself from bridge
to ice
        why would you want so
to say to me or to God once more
that nothing is fair
among fair women and hardy men

to God
            who never once cared
now name him as you will

it's both night and day
not done well to you or anyone
less or better
                    not well

Rembrandt

blunt
        he knew
solidities
            darkness
light
      all those men
      in "The Night Watch"

what they saw
in the nooks of their view

but why then
the apostle's style

and why
          the Jewish bride
untouched
             her groom
handling her breast

her lower gown

redder than the darkest ruby?

Autobiography

every night I dream I have
wakened to find someone else
has written and published
my autobiography
made of tapes of my own voice
in words I have never spoken

Don Quixote Writes to His Priest

neither their books nor magicians
offer harm to our person or travellers

once a skinned rabbit alarmed us
as did a lamb's head chucked on the road
all its flesh wounded and
but one eye remarking sadly
the quick feet of passing men

they flavour their tea with shiba
mint leaves, rough sugar in lumps,
take it with almond cakes

nothing in their medinas offends

yet each night someone pours smoking
dreams into my ears and nostrils

when my mouth opens
only arabic scribbles emerge

who turns my folded thoughts
back and forth
the pages of an unreliable book?

Oscar Wilde

my warden stares counting again
clenched anxieties
                    worn
arguments crumbling reassurances
I've stolen from my day's ration

he looks oddly at the rose-red city
ruined inside my head
                    he measures
gaps opened by earthquakes in my skull

later he will prod at pigs
turn over one by one dazed hungers
squirming desires

would you now say to my people
the poems were worth it?

take these coins for my children
say after
        it was art I cared for
despised life

Saskatchewan Surveyor

at a correction line
he reads the wind's grammar

rhetoric falls from trees

in a simple sentence of land
a disappointed syntax

For Ann: On the Question of Franco's Successor

above me three ochre terraces
olive trees design another cliff
amid concrete, wood, new apartments
workmen sing flamenco   casual
passionate
                ochre land
                                red
land   slate mountains
yellow birds   day
sky   yellow as a finch
moon   look
a whitewashed house on a hill

is a great leap forward necessary
are fortunes to be made at a red bridge

we have felt our own colour, skin
in sun morning and moon night and

satisfied (we say) we see
land   sea

knowledge no longer a burden

we know freedom
                            songs

Earthworms Eat Earthworms and Learn

as with Aunt Adeline
the one with the large bosom
one of the complicated cousins
who on a hot Regina afternoon
wept at a hurt finger
and thrust into her vagina
other fingers

so eating one another worm
knows inside another worm
the square root Adeline knew
and cousins knowing cousins
uncles uncles
aunts aunts

it goes on
wisdom of cells

this rod dividing into that
rod into that code that code

so it was with Aunt Eda
who coded Uncle Lou
who had himself been coded

into

and father knew father
mothering the last of the jews
who on the Hirsch land
put in new seeds
and new codes
and new aunts

so we survived
but had become
being as
we were

solutions

the seed

the new seed

final solution

remember forever the neon
Orpheum (?) Winnipeg 1935
lights exploding liquid
oh the elegant lobby
uncles and lights lights lights
then
        film

Locality

new year's eve my friend from Utah
remarks a cubist view of our village
from his apartment
                              church
pine tree
              white tilted homes

"our village" I said

it was the need for art
made me greedy about lives
knowing nothing of their homes
or for that matter
                              our own

but it was cold
our children made loud noise
driving out even these desperate spirits

late   alone   I remembered
it was not Spain but Estevan,
that home, I meant

Agatha Christie

being civil she saw poison
as a flaw in character
the use of a knife
a case history in Freud

difficult to explain
her dislike of jews

or why night upon night
she plotted solutions
to deaths she must have dreamed

her 200,000,000 readers
how much longing for murder
the neatness of England
is and still remains

though in Belfast, say,
bombs have other reasons
and no one explains

Message from Saturn

I have not forgotten
their camps   ovens
electronic dentists curators
surgeons newspapers genital
prongs their devices

now the unmemory
the forgetting

knowing this witness
no other testimony

see they approach
children not knowing

how the planet burned
from what star strangers came
their eyes their helmets
mask of turtle

children my children
welcome them
sing war songs old songs

Chief Dan Kennedy

when he was eighty
anthropology
impressed him
also memory

now at one hundred
he remembers
his dark wife
her silence

night night
what reason
what delight
either bed
or waking
could excuse

and down there
yes there the same
village whores
his people ours

he showed me
past
        English journals
with maps
pictures of Indians

On the Death of Ho Chi Minh

toward the end
he became frail as rice paper
his beard whispering thin ideograms

how unlike the great carved storm
that was Marx's face
                                    how unlike
the darkness and fury
in Beethoven's head
                                   scarcely
anything to be consumed

bombs destroy   destroy
you cannot touch his body now
or burn his poems

First Political Speech

first, in the first place, to begin with, secondly,
in the second place, lastly

again, also, in the next place, once more, moreover,
furthermore, likewise, besides, similarly, for example,
for instance, another

then, nevertheless, still, however, at the same time,
yet, in spite of that, on the other hand, on the contrary

certainly, surely, doubtless, indeed, perhaps, possibly,
probably, anyway, in all probability, in all likelihood,
at all events, in any case

therefore, consequently, accordingly, thus, as a result,
in consequence of this, as might be expected

the foregoing, the preceding, as previously mentioned

as already stated

Transition Table
from *Learning to Write* by Ernest H. Winter (Second
Revised Edition) Macmillan (Toronto, 1961), p.156

On the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz: Memorial Services, Toronto, January 25, 1970 YMHA Bloor & Spadina

the name is hard
a German sound made out of
the gut guttural throat
y scream yell ing open
voice mouth growl
and sweat
"the only way out of Auschwitz
is through the chimneys"
of course
that's second hand that's told
again Sigmund Sherwood (Sobolewski)
twisting himself into that sentence
before us on the platform
the poem
shaping itself late in the after
noon later than it would be:

Pendericki's "Wrath of God"
moaning electronic Polish theatric
the screen silent
framed by the name
looking away from/pretending not there
no name no not name no

Auschwitz
in GOTHIC lettering
the hall
a parody a reminiscence a nasty memory
the Orpheum in Estevan before Buck Jones
the Capitol in Regina before Tom Mix
waiting for the guns
waiting for the cowboy killers
one two three
Legionnaires
Polish ex-prisoners Association
Legions
their medals their flags

so the procession, the poem gradual
ly insistent beginning to shape itself
with the others
walked with them
into the YMHA Bloor & Spadina
thinking apocalypse shame degradation
thinking bones and bodies melting
thickening thinning melting bones and bodies
thinking not mine / must speak clearly
the poet's words / Yevtyshenko at Baba-Yar

there this January snow
heavy wet the wind heavy wet
the street grey white slush melted concrete
bones and bodies melting slush
saw
with the others
the prisoner
in the YMHA hall Bloor & Spadina
arms wax stiff body stiff unnatural
coloured face blank eyes
walked
with the others toward the screen
toward the picture
SLIDES
this is mother
this is father
this is
the one who is
waving her arms like that
is the one who
like
I mean running with her breasts bound
ing
running
with her hand here and there
with her here and
there
hands
that that is
the poem becoming the body
becoming the faint hunger

ing body
prowling
through
words the words words the words
opening   mouths ovens
the generals smiling saluting
in their mythic uniforms god-like
generals uniforms with the black leather
with the straps and the intricate leather
the phylacteries and the prayer shawl
corsets and the boots and the leather straps

and the shining faces of the generals in their boots
and their stiff wax bodies their unnatural faces
and their blank eyes and their hands their stiff hands
and the generals in their straps and wax and stiff
staying standing
melting bodies and thickening
quick flesh on flesh handling
hands
the poem flickers, fades
the four Yarzeit candles guttering one
each four million lights dim
my words drift
smoke from chimneys and ovens
a bad picture, the power failing
pianist clattering on and over and through
the long Saturday afternoon in the Orpheum
while the whitehatted star spangled cowboys
shot the dark men and shot the dark men
and we threw popcorn balls and grabbed
each other and cheered:
me jewboy yelling
for the shot town and the falling men
and the lights come on
and
with the others
standing in silence

the gothic word hangs
over us on a shroud-white screen

and we drift away
                    to ourselves
                        to the late Sunday Times
                              the wet snow
                              the city

                              a body melting

The President and the Chairman Meet

1

when great men greet each other
with tea and wine and ceremony
small ones draw close
to guard themselves

2

there will be storms
as ever nightfall only
much later moon rising

3

drunkenness, prison, disgrace
a bad book of poems
                        who distinguishes?

two hundred years old the olive trees
twist under time no worse than ours

4

so many deeds cry out to be done
only the hour waits
                    the chairman
and the congress senators
before our great leap forward
before we find again the same
almond trees   the same moon

Political Speech

(for PET)

think: planets turn
        moons come into phase and out again
        tiny spanish birds rise to their own songs
        night comes and goes
        in the heavens constellations wheel
        and this man speaks

                         (beyond form
                            words like gyres
                            like Kubrick's great
                               globe
                         its weltschmerz

                         voices   voices

                         at night they come to me
                         disguised as clowns
                         or in their sinister form
                         as policemen, sisters
                         asking me again
                         to plunge down
                         a great elevator
                         to take a merry-go-round
                         whose legs are silk pants

                               a sewer in my throat

but there are no voices
inside or outside this poem
neither a poem nor an opera
you said
          we're losing this now
it no longer makes sense
it isn't going to work

thesis: freedom
antithesis: necessity

if the revolution was about to occur
would the people of quebec rise up

the people of quebec would rise up

therefore the revolution was about to occur

wrong again
it goes another way:
since
you always did as I said
washed
your speeches wiped your rhetoric
clean as the parsing in your prose
looked after the creases in your biology
and the intertrigo in your quadrivium
you drew the following circles in the air:

the nation is rational

(wrong)

america is either good or bad

(equally wrong)

canada is either possible or not

(still wrong)

and the possibility?

only that we are older
and awake
or not

Political Science

(after Brecht and Trudeau)

in the cartoon by Groz
lechery   greed
                    those
outlines: spiritual beings

and here   the same vomit
chips lager iconic tits

there's your new nation
one juridical
                    and free

Cabinet Secrets

1

privy to secrets I'm giving this one
away free: Canadian Daniel Ellsberg
with 47 volumes of our own genuine Pentagon Papers
(secretly I've yearned to be an anarchist
enemy of the state, traitor, political prisoner
Clifford Irving
                                        at night I dream of
half-naked girls running through streets,
Stratford, Estevan, Yellow Grass, Corrinne)

I know the senior civil servant
who at 4:00 am in cold October
carried to the Governor General who
I think had not yet run his usual three
miles before breakfast the war measures
act to be signed
                                    once he showed me
the cabinet room the table where

ministers sit where the prime minister
sits where the civil servant sits at
a secretary's table of eighteenth-century
but it is especially maple or walnut or
curved and I know where he must have written
war measures

2

so it has been always
archangels with great golden eyes
you cannot look at   those aloof hands
those golden tables
                                listen: I have heard
they do secret studies they have profiles
so finally I think angels come to a hole
in the ground inside a house inside a farm

with aloof hands
they make coffins
photographs

they take the guns of revelation

terror dug out of the ground
like wet mice
                        disappears
in the eternal silence

the cabinet

From "The Pentagon Papers"

Glossary:

AA
AAA
AID
ASA
ABM
AMB
ASAP
CAT
CHICOM
CHINAT
CHMAAG
CIAP
CINCPAC
COMUSMACV
DIA
DOD
EPTEL
(Deptel/Septel?)
FAL
FAR
FEC
FMWA
FY
FYI

ICA
ICC
I
IDA
ISA
KIA
LOC
MAAG
MAC
MAP
MDAP
PACON
POLAD
QTE

ROK RSM RSSZ RTA RVNAF RVNA SACSAMSAR
SMMSNIESTCSVNTAORTERMTETTFTO&ETRIMUNO
USAFUSGUSIAUSIBUSISUSOMUWVCVMVNVNAFVOA
WTYT
UNQTE
ROLLING THUNDER

BARREL ROLL

BLUE SPRINGS FARMGATE FLAMING DART LEAPING LENA

The Trilemma:
a. Will-breaking strikes on the North (para 7) are
balked by (1) flash-point limits, (2) by doubts
that DRV will cave and (3) by doubts that VC will
obey caving DRV
b. Large U.S. troop deployments. (para 9) are blocked
by "French-defeat" and "Korea" syndromes, and Quat is
queasy. (Troops could be net negatives, and be beseiged).
c. Exit by negotiations (para 9) is tainted by the
humiliation likely to follow.

insurrection defection dissension impotence defeatism concession accommodation

    deployment of Frogs and Sams in North Vietnam
    hot pursuit flak suppression strike strikes strikes
risks:
    losses panic revulsion sympathetic fires over
    Berlin, Cyprus, Kashmir, Jordan waters

        stretch-out retard the program
        circuit breaker

                shunt

Sea Things: Nerja

this poem is built to
see through

                see through

this poem

            see

through

        it

is

   nothing

            nothing

is this poem see

through

        over and
over   I said
nothing
        no one
believed
        me

or the poem
              not

there

      see

The Garden of Delights

and so we went down to the river
to the corpses there but on our way
beside a willow copse we heard ring-
ing sounds as if a tree were hung
with bells and looked to see the willow
blossom into crystal as if its leaves
were birds
                so from the branches hung
lovers copulate their loves dropping
into a giant pool where storks and emus
swam with copulating lovers in their wings
while from their eggs emerged the limbs
of love and lovers clasping legs about
crystal goblets, bells and some stroked
flutes that blew sweet music from their
assholes while others sucked the tongues
of birds being fucked by mice or toads
or long-eared sages whose bald heads
served service to young balding girls
their legs entwined about the sage's eyes
and all went circling round the pool
of love
            now
                two such bodies will
not be seen again
                        love dear
in them life dear in them

so I looked at corpses, noticing
three female death still coy in them
and thought the whole world is a coffin
and a bed
                and watched the river wash
blood over a dark city near the top
(or bottom) left of Bosch's tryptich

Velasquez: Las Meninas

1

change the lines about
stone man and stone moon
to read   reflect on images

(fish locked in ice
a memory of summer)

since form longs to be free
and not to know its name

just so
        Velasquez put him-
self into Las Meninas creat-
ing not only "a theology
of painting"
                but self:

(if he is
            there who
painted the picture?

Gautier: "but where is the
picture?")
            neither anecdot-
al nor deceitful
                measured

as if in that court your
life "saved" depended on

style: looking "as if"

so that Dona Margarita looks
out as deformed Maria Barbola
looks out
            at (being looked at
by The Maids in Waiting) Felipe?

Mariana? who look into a mirror
looking out at you looking at
them
        as if
              I hadn't saved the
poem from the moon stone

and the stone man

2

if he is looking at the
picture he could not have
painted it
              if he isn't
how could he have painted
it
   if he painted it
where was he
                    if he is
in it

3

"We observe the artist is
not painting on the canvas
which we as spectators are
viewing"
              Complete Guide
              to the Prado etc.

4

reflect: if he is
not painting that
painting

5

"calculating the real
existence of atmosphere"

Envoi

my country is not a country
                                        but winter
rivers of ice
from St. Hubert terrible knives
run through the whiteness of my veins

politics pierce my heart
on a floor littered with history
I shiver while wardens shovel in
lunatic sentences, rag upon rag

it must be cold in prison, in québec

and your heart hurt singer
what do you see through its pane

icy slaves circle the river
montréal tense against the steel of its manacles
your words drifting   frozen wounds
                                                        blessing
a sick bride
a murderous bridegroom
                                        that wedding
whose children will be colder killers
than the words of this or any other song

from *Out of Place*

I

The Return

the return:

in the estevan poem, for example,
how every one can be seen eating
or is it reading
                    but not everyone
there is myself in the souris valley
forty years later
                      Ann
looking at wild flowers
cactus   their thick colours

I remember how I dreamt
her
      pale as a flower
      in the white sun
and in the dream
she is taking pictures

she photographs me
walking away
along a curving path
the flowers coloured
                  and
my father appears
my mother appears
saying no words
troubled
             and all
the ghostly jews
of estevan
             praying

in the synagogue
of the valley
in the covenant
of coal mines
in these pictures
of estevan

signs:

and omens   windows
facing inward
“an ideal
inserted into the plane
we call reality”   words
warning this is the place
you reach
to name
remember and recite

whatever has been hidden here
remains of speech
the town lives
in its syntax we are ghosts

look   on the road beyond
mesas and moonscape
hoodoos   signs cut in rock
graffiti   gods
an indescribable border

doors of perception:

roads lead here there
on the prairie Ann holds the Pinto
along great swoops of highway down
from Lloydminster past Batoche
rebellion Rudy's book researched
prophetic voices as a guide

in Huxley's version time curves
upon itself
              cities of the mescal dream
turned biblical jeweled places
palaces of John in Revelation
Blake's engraving the drunkenness
of Smart's madness prophecy

our history is in motion curved
like straight correction lines
earth-measured on a western grid
place known through time time
measuring place
                    Thompson walked
through unafraid for knowing
measurement and lore
                         ignorant
of clocks and vision we accelerate
a sweep through dying towns and farms

now is the badlands measure
our choices random we believe
whatever we can find or where the map
of our own voices leads us listening to

the road to the cancer clinic
past the sundial's didacticism
toward the language of shadows
bedlam the alcoholic's nightmare
uses of wheat and rye and mould

strict farms die
beside the rails the roads

the sons construct
the rules of mind

the jewish exodus from shtetl to the plains
leads to this eygpt abraham learned
dream-sickness and the way to heal
a place of bread and chemistry

madness is neither east nor north
Riel was hung in streets
I walked on every day to school

birthmark:

seeing a mouse
my mother struck her temple

he'll be marked at birth
she said
        the women cried

I carry the souris
on my brow
            the river
in my head
            the valley
of my dreams
still echoes
with her cry

badlands:

1

black against sky
four horses   simple
particulars   amid
the endless treachery
that is remembering

there are no definitions

2

neither difficult nor easy
crossings
                happen
it appears

3

understand this
simplicity
this land is
treacherous

between Hirsch and
Hoffer
             it is
plain

4

neither difficult nor easy
crossings
                appear
it happens

5

four horses   amid
the endless treachery
that is remembering

desire

near hirsch a jewish cemetery:

ann is taking pictures again
while I stand in the uncut grass
counting the graves: there are forty
I think
          the Hebrew puzzles me
the wind moving the grass
over the still houses of the dead

from the road a muffled occasional
roar   cars passing   no one there
casts a glance at the stone trees
the unliving forest of Hebrew graves

in the picture I stand arms outstretched
as if waiting for someone
                              I am
in front of the gates you can see
the wind here   the grass
always bending the stone unmoved

slaughterhouse:

after the morning in the slaughterhouse
grandfather leading me back to the kitchen
the farm unpainted weathered grandmother
milking guts of shit for skins and kishke
it's not a place for boys she says
her face redder than strawberries
her hands like cream

lost place:

in the book of years
berner told me could be found
your own name exactly spelled
his own his sons the russian
names of villages and jews

twelve strangled ducklings

you were written

I read the land for records now

wild strawberries   cocoa-butter
taste of Hirsch
                              bags of curdling
warm spent streams

tested on a hair of berner's beard
the ritual slaughter knife

even the blood has disappeared

estevan, 1934:

remembering the family we
called breeds   the Roques
their house smelling of urine
my mother's prayers before
the dried fish she cursed
them for their dirtiness their
women I remember too
                                        how
seldom they spoke and
they touched one another

even when the sun killed
cattle and rabbis
                              even
in poisoned slow air
like hunters
                        like lizards
they touched   stone
they touched
                        earth

lines for an imaginary cenotaph:

george hollingdale
bruce carey
george chapman
jacob barney mandel

William Tell Mandel: sd
Capt A.W. (ab) Hardy

Isaac Berner
Annie's
son

all the kinds of war
we say our kaddish for

chief Dan Kennedy
singing
beneath the petroglyphs
hoodoos we sd
at Roche Percée

Assiniboine songs

returning from war:

(for jbm 1918-1944)

floors gleaming in the white frame house
yellow as wax the night before he died
she said her eyes yellow as a hawk's
she saw him dressed in white   clean
she said this in the room   the blinds
drawn   heat leaning on the house
over the room's dusk the floor's gleam
white   he was so clean

in the estevan summer
hazardous as desert hear
gopher squeaks momentary hawks
lean in the pushing and shoving
wind   the sun breathing
heat
      and the impossibility of death

petroglyphs at st. victor:

1

watching the sun
watching the sun's wheel
great slow metaphors
wheel toward me out of the sun

they take my eyes from my head
they place my eyes on rocks
they take my crying tongue
they wheel back toward the sun
their black hands carrying my name

now my drawings of god
look no better than my child's
drawing of me
                    I remember
the sun   his arms flailing
wheat and skin   his mouth
warning of hollows and gulleys
one eye grinning   news
about crossings
                    I try feet now
get the toes wrong
forget the signals once again

whether the snake's head
points inside or outside the sun
for circling the snake ridge
I've always been wrong
about metaphors
about the five figures
of discourse
                 the seventy
names of rhetoric and tree
alphabets
          when they gave me
my name I knew the only one
to follow me would mistake

my image/sign
all the others
praising the gods

2

the crooked gods:

do they mean anything?
I ask Ann
parkland
rolling below sandstone

silent
she turns
the camera
here
there
I kneel
before the crooked gods

last light wheeling
over the land
their handprints
their great feet
their stone faces
move
turning
we leave
take with us
photographs
silent
as
their open mouths

3

Point Alison
where the super-continental stands
our children cry out
barely glimpse redness a form
the end of names and aesthetics

later
amid wreckage of slippers
licorice I remember the cut
god's mouths at Wood Mountain
rhetoric of stone its bluntness

Ann
talking
about children
tomorrow
our return
home
train time

the hoffer colony:

just as in McCourt's *Saskatchewan*
though unlike his prose
clapboard buildings on a ridge
pastel fields tree stumps
an overturned quebec heater
iron bedstead rusting
useless springs
                    the clichés
appalling   over-written
like a bad travel book

and in a concrete vault its floor
littered with prairie I find
scripture a farmer's exodus Israel
Hoffer's accounting I begin
to feel gloomy about possibilities
in mythology some books of the bible
devote themselves to family lines
some to a census
                    there are stories
about passionate heroic tax
collectors   others where merchants
ruined by investment sell children

I look uneasily at grain inventories
machinery bills, newspapers
think about my uncle standing
among rocks with Israel
both Jews proud and successful

before we take our easy leave
how should we understand
prophecies and miracles?

II

The Double

the doppelganger:

ways to prevent me:

refusing to be interrupted especially by children
single-mindedness to the point of brutality
in all matters of politics religion metaphysics &
the character and lives of your closest friends
praising the worst lines of your fellow writers
jogging followed by volley ball and cold showers
concentrated masturbation before and after sex
sleeping with a towel knotted in your back
inspired teaching ferocious tactics in rumoli
combinations of alcohol librium and bad novels

seeing I'm here you know all methods fail
you don't even know how long it has been
what I might have said to children or others
now it's forever too late
no one could possibly know
you've been gone for days
when I make love to your wife
she will moan and praise you
asking you never to leave

where shall I say you have gone?

doubles: estevan

the Orpheum shows a desert film
in Ann's picture the Orpheum is pale
against a paler sunlight a washed-out
film: someone who could be me stands
beside a sweet shop that the Mathers ran
for boys whose faces had been ruined

on such illusions we have built our lives
palaces of art where Sara dreams
her precious dream of being
                                        all that
every image makes impossible and true

licorice whips and jawbreakers
that sweetness of the tongue mocks
broken faces of the ones returned
like images of films we fled
the hunchback lobster monster
broken patched
                    I stand
inside the film and stare
at places that I never knew

questions a double asks:

whether anything in your dreams accounts for
his appearing now
how it is the explanation of acute anxiety does
not suffice to dispel him
what in your philosophical readings could be
consistent with the notion of reduplication
whether he is a refutation of clock time and a
way to justify eternity
why you are afraid of him as shown by your
blood pressure and pulse

does his appearance improve your sexual
performance
has the government of Canada Ontario Alberta
significantly changed because of his presence
what explanations you offer to your father/to
your department chairman/to the department of revenue
give a detailed account of all sado-masochistic
fantasies you entertain
refer to each scatalogical childhood incident
coprophilia necrophilia sodomy

do you know yourself

have you any reason for hope or delight

why do you think I am here

will you change your life

account for the difference between the spider
and the spider plant

have you considered the fern the coleus the
philodendron the patience plant the flowers
the hoya the lilies of the day the ants bees
sweetness light the sun the moon

why are you writing out these questions

will you do nothing to help me

is poetry all you have to offer

the double world:

it is variously believed that this world is the
double of another, as in Plato, Swedenborg, Malebranche,
some of Immanuel Kant, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov,
Stanley Kubrick
                    Two clocks set at the same time in
identical universes should stop at the same time.
This clock is a shadow of that real clock. When I
look at my clock I have no way of knowing whether I am in
the first or second universe. It is spring there too:
and the other Ann has grown an avocado exactly the same
height, greenness, number of leaves as the one Ann grew
here or there. My grandfather Berner weighed the same
in both universes, sang sweet Jewish psalms, ate sour
curds. In the two graveyards Annie Berner is dead.
Nothing on either prairie changes though the winds blow
across immensities your heart would shrivel to imagine
knowing they pass between the worlds and can be heard to do
so on the road to Wood Mountain. That is what was written
in the rocks.

instructions:
(on the nature of doubles and doubling)

all mirrors should be covered
do not look deeply into a sink of hot water
ditto cold
wear rings on only two fingers
your eyes are doubles doubled
everything divides by two or is uneven
poetry consists in the doubling of words
doubled words are poetic words
this is the true meaning of duplicity
each poem speaks to another poem
the language of poetry is a secret language
these are the true doubles

false doubles are ones and threes
four is a good number

doubled names are: eli elijah
jesse jesus
paul saul
joseph pharoah
etc.

in Hebrew this is common
no one knows the jewish name of god
indian names are secret
poetry is the naming of secret names
among these are:
god
spirit
alphabets

names in stone
doubled names
the psalms
hoodoos
animals
eyes
jewels

the place of no shadows called badlands
the place of shadows called badlands
you begin to see the difficulties

III

A Suite for Ann

Strange Places

the places that we go are strange
but stranger that we go to place
our strangeness where we neither
know we were nor where but only
that the place we know is neither

but the way that tells us
we have been
                    not only here
but where there was the telling

it was so
            we did not choose it
it was
      so

Place

a line
colour

history
places
          never
choose
never
          it is
we know
love
      not
chosen

here

The Wayfarer

Darkness flows over the green
the horn fills with night

languid
where children are laughing

though she sings of night
she remembers
                    journeys

look how thick the forest
where she has been
or where
            night
spills over

IV

Epilogue

Pictures in an Institution

1

Notice: all mirrors will be covered
the mailman is forbidden to speak
professors are confined to their offices
faculties no longer exist.

2

I speak of what I know,
how uncle Asher, spittle on his lips,
first typed with harvest hands the fox
across a fence and showing all good men
come to their country's aid rushed off to Israel
there to brutalize his wife and son

how step-grandfather Barak wiped
sour curds out of his curly beard
before he roared the Sabbath in my ears
what Sara, long his widow, dreamed
the night she cried: God, let him die at last,
thinking perhaps of Josef who had lost
jewels in Russia where the Cossack rode
but coughed his stomach out in Winnipeg

Your boredom does not matter. I take,
brutal to my thoughts, these lives, defy
your taste in metaphor; the wind-break
on the farm that Barak plowed to dust
makes images would ruin public poetry.

The rites of love I knew:
how father cheated brother, uncle, son,
and bankrupt-grocer, that we might eat
wrote doggerel verse, later took his wife,

my mother, in the English way beside my bed.
Why would he put his Jewishness aside?
Because there was no bread?
                                        Or out of spite
that doctors sliced his double rupture,
fingered spleen, and healed his bowel's ache?

Lovers lie down in glades, are glad.
These, now in graves, their headstones sunk,
knew nothing of such marvels, only God, his ways,
owning no texts of Greek or anthropology.

3

Notice: the library is closed to all who read
                 any student carrying a gun
                 registers first, exempt from fines,
                 is given thirteen books per month,
                 one course in science, one in math,
                 two options
                                   campus police
                 will see to co-ed's underwear

4

These names I rehearse:
                                        Eva, Isaac,
Charley, Yetta, Max
                              now dead
or dying or beyond my lies

till I reeling with messages
and sick to hold again their bitter lives
put them, with shame, into my poetry.

5

Notice: there will be no further communication
                 lectures are cancelled
                 all students are expelled
                 the reading of poetry is declared a public crime

from *Life Sentence*

On the Murder of Salvador Allende

1

hopeless + remote
you peer from a balcony
your voice light as a girl's voice
                              your face
now that I look at it closely
not a pale petal   a photograph

under the flower of your face
it says here   in this unreliable
newspaper   you cried out
at last to your people

did you allow yourself
an impossible vision
                           all your countrymen
marching in rows towards guns and armour
embracing the soldiers   drowning
the colonels   with kisses and flowers

or did you
fated and tough old marxist
turn back to your desk
look again at rows of figures
                           deficits demands
the hemorrhage of capital and reserves
the streets bloody   your people defeated

2

this photograph shows a gun
silently exploding
                                        there are
above the city mountains
something that looks like a man
leans out of a palace window

3

I have been taught an intricate
love of efficient death

I respond with appropriate gestures
as in this elegy
                              funeral rites
for a doctor distant and unknown
my poetry itself serving the state
with its celebration of your murder

4

twice only have I met your compatriots   doctor
once in Regina a distant cousin who taught me
Neruda
                    and in Toledo by the banks of the Tagus
the night sky brilliant with flowers of light
a dark boy his hands supple   singing

I know nothing of your history your people
your cause
                    only a bad story about words
spoken at the coffin of your father

only this image of palaces and knives
the silent explosion of guns

it changes nothing: it goes on:
today in Omonia Square   guns in the mouth of speech

yesterday in Mozambique
the same taste
of death and torture
admirals calculating
losses and reserves

5

it may be in the mines of your country
a dark face looks up briefly

in the hills remote and aloof or dully
an Indian stares at the sky

do they remember names
do they remember the morning of the death squad
what stood there on the palace steps

the morning of the death squad
the morning of Lorca's death
how out of bullets in his mouth poems flowered?

The Madwomen of the Plaza de Mayo

They wear white scarves and shawls.
They carry pictures on strings about their necks.
I have seen their faces elsewhere:
in Ereceira, fishermen's wives
walking in dark processions
to the sea, its roaring,
women of Ireland
wearing their dark scarves
hearing the echo of guns, bombs

Identities
the *desaparecidos*
lost ones
the disappeared

in the Plaza the Presidential Palace
reveals soldiers like fences with steel spikes
the rhythm of lost bodies
the rhythm of loss

A soldier is a man who is not a man.
A fence, a spike
A nail in somebody's eye.
Lost man.

Why are the women weeping?
For whom do they cry
under the orange moon
under the lemon moon of Buenos Aires?

"If only for humanitarian reasons
tell the families of the living
where are they
tell the families of the dead
what they need
what they deserve to know."

No one speaks.
The junta says nothing.
The *desaparecidos* remain silent.
The moon has no language.

Aguirre: Wrath of God

I will sleep with my daughter
this mad man cries and we will create
beautiful people to command
this new land which he had tried
in his madness to take from
Incas   Indians his own princes of Spain
the river itself
                    how much blood
how many shitting kings
arrowed or put to the sword

yet the truth is
few came down the river
took the breathless green
mountains
               those dark people
in their madness 137 slaughtered
thousands thousands fell before them
their book of god

so Herzog's movie moves toward its end
the mad king tottering on the raft
I reach out/touch the breasts of young women
noting the movie ends with monkeys
as if they were rats or plague
anyhow images of lust monkeys
making what we call love

Machu Picchu: by the Sacrificial Rock

There was a sickness inside me.
Bird of unknown colours.
And I thought, I will go to Peru,
to the high mountains, to the cities
Inca Lords built in impossible places.

There it will fly out of my mouth
this hissing bird. It will sound hot
as if cut from the living breast of one
held toward the sun. The Incas say,
in their bird speech, the sun is god.

And the Inca himself is a bird
who flies toward the sun.
Thousands and thousands of birds
die every day so he may be clothed
in the plumage of the sun itself.

At the stone called the sun's hitching post,
at the altar of sacrifices I waited,
the air thin as a knife blade,
my mouth opening and closing.
But the sun fell into a mist.

What is the sound of oppression
or royalty? In their markets
the Quecheuan whisper and listen,
transistors muttering to them
languages ancient and implacable.

Not even in mountains so high
they take your heart out of your mouth,
not even in cities perched like condors
where the sun rides out of the universe,
not even now will you gain or be given
ransom/release. The Quecheuan whisper
and listen, the sound of ancient bondage.

Parting at Udaipur: the Lake Palace

In Calcutta a Bengali artist explains
his family lived in a tree swarming with uncles,
incest and possession. It is an allegory.
Then there's the other story about a mongoose mother.
The tree swarms. Later his mother
will warn him she is about to die.

I think of snake charmers, how they produce
out of a sack a blur of slither
how it clamps teeth into a python's head,
savaging the dull beast.

At Gujarat an intellectual lets me know
she despises her husband, academics, poetry
her unequivocal dark hands handling a book,
poems my friend has given her.

From the Taj windows in Bombay
the Gates of India imperial and aloof
open to the Arabian sea. The heat drains
whatever leans in the wind that blows from the desert.
The harbour fills with the blood of the setting sun.

I despair of reason, knowledge, my lectures,
remember only Ann turning away at Udaipur,
the boat from the palace creating distances.
We are in a strange land. We are drifting apart.
India is between us. Across the lake, its sunken
woman, lie continents:
war torture poison
an apparatus of romance
to keep us apart.

Birds Prophesy: There Is Good, There Is Evil

This night I dream of a man with a bird's head
I have forgotten old stories about bird's prophecies:
how my mother, for example, looking at fowl
called rabbis to consult books of wisdom and law,
listened to their sayings. Birds flocking
here or there call down a rooky night.

There is no leap a man can make beyond his fate,
even if he is a bird himself,
even if he can fly beyond these vast hills.
It comes upon him like night and the cold
in high mountains carrying the death of the sun.
It comes upon him like disease on beggars.
It carries within it the substance of nightmare,
heavy wings beating inside a fearful breast,
hawk faces, vultures inside men's bodies.

Once his heart sang, once he knew bright places,
nothing was impossible, not even love itself.
He knew nothing of the birds, he knew no auguries.
He was proud. He solved riddles, knew poetry.

What will you say now to his sick heart?
What can you say of anything that soars,
even the noble bird there, beyond the sun itself?

"Grandfather's Painting": David Thauberger

Under David Thauberger's painting
showing his grandfather's house
and that giant horse standing above it,
the town of Holdfast, wheat fields,
church, elevators, and prairie grass
the TV set turned to a
Saturday Night Movie called "Marathon Man"
looks very small and peculiar,
but the movie is about politics,
betrayal and South American Nazis: it has to do
with various kinds of torture,
the use of a dentist's drill,
for example, the tyranny of McCarthy
in America of the fifties, Jews,
their memory, camps, the White Angel,
specialist in teeth, skulls, and diamonds.
    You wouldn't believe how large the horse is
in Thauberger's painting above the TV set
and yet it only portrays a symbol of how his grandfather
ruled the land, the power by which the little town
was run, the motor of the little town called Holdfast
while beneath it the real powers that run us,
pictures, say, and how we know how to kill one another,
metaphors of murder, these are played out night
upon night and I watch them and watch the painting,
no longer knowing whether I should write poetry,
especially poems about land, about Estevan,
or about why I came back to Regina, Saskatchewan,
this cold winter of 1979 or what I thought
I might find in a city of this kind to write of,
now that my father is dead for many years, and my mother,
and most of my friends are in the arts.
                                        There are nights
cold enough to kill. They remind me of my boyhood,
how much I loved the winter on the prairies, never
believing it was deadly or that we fought to be alive here
though my fantasies were of war. That powerful animal,
this evening with the Marathon Man running,
running, I suddenly know David was right to paint him,

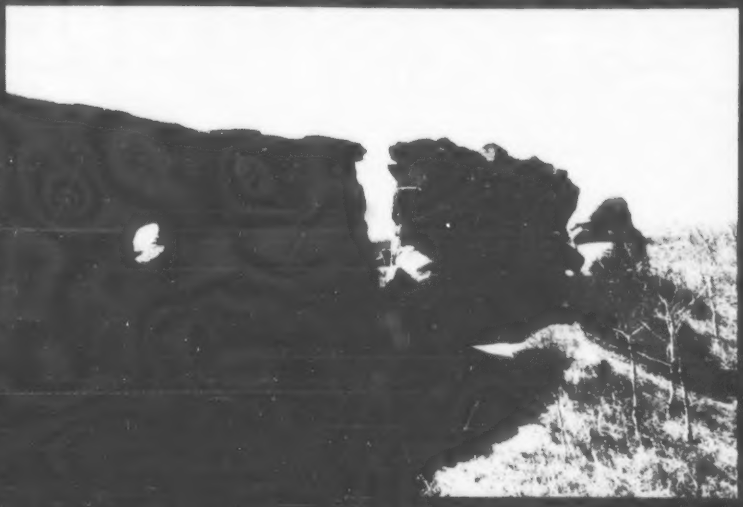
his grandfather. We stand over the land, fathers,
and over our homes and over each other.
We have terrible forces inside us: we can paint them,
green, acrylic, glitter: the form never lies.
The truth is in the long dead winters where we live.

In My 57th Year

This is the year my mother lay dying
knocked down by tiny strokes she claimed
never once hit her though when she lay
crib-like where they laid her there she wept
for shame to be confined so near her death.
This is the year the cancer inside my father's
groin began its growth to knock him down
strong as he was beside his stricken wife.
This is the year I grew, ignorant of politics,
specious with law, careless of poetry.
There were no graves. The prairie rolled on
as if it were the sea. Today my children make
their way alone across those waves.
Do lines between us end as sharply
as lines our artists draw upon the plains?
I cry out. They keep their eye upon
their politics, their myths,
careful of lives as I was careless.

What shall I say? It is too late to tell again
tales we never knew. The legends of ourselves
spill into silence. All we never said, father
to daughter, son to unmanned man, we cannot say
to count the years.
                    I no longer know time or age
thinking of parents, their time, their grave of names.
Telling the time, fiction consumes me.

UNPUBLISHED, UNCOLLECTED POEMS



The Abstract Man

The abstract man in his rage
removed his arms and legs,
undid the buttons of his chest,
unzipped his final chord,
to find the music box within.

Alas, inside the abstract man
only circles of desire swam
upon an oily lake of rainbows,
an odoured marsh of spectrums.

Apothecary, sweeten him.
Is there no drug for motion
or for lust to fasten him,
to hook him from his lake?
Where is the king or magi
who will mend the unzipped
disappointed abstract man?

Accident

Where points meet in the snow
Many matters are finally determined;
Pleased with our free speed
We rush to liberty through snow.

For speed composes us; heart beats
And things race through the blood;
Our subject is our living as we go
Over the veins where the fast blood heats.

Collisions release us and we are free
And rusting hulks handle this weather
Objectively, that yesterday
Shone as they sped now melt or freeze,
There is no other.

We are become things, and only
The blood runs now where it is free
And spelled in red headlines
Over the girl's lips and loins
That free fluid goes;
Nor can she pull herself together
Where she lies in the snow,
Nor any anti-freeze keep her from cold.

Alice in Daliworld

Burned in his wonderland by the Possible Man
He was left ashes at the foot of a sphinx
Of his own devising and a puzzle
He had cooked up in his own embers.

He remained there weeping, the unphilosopher,
Tail end of a Cheshire cat which had
Ceased to smile, he was its disappeared remainder;
And tried with all the rhymes he'd ever heard
To please it into coming back again.

As one by one the skulls of his endeavour fell
He stepped across them and he tried again
Until the sphinx and all the clocks had flown away.

Then, legendary hero in his Daliworld,
He flew about encountering Queens
And courtezans, and Kings who lavished gold
On him who was a favorite until morning
And his own impossible self marched by:
O see its head of snakes and eyes
Grow great and weep to find him stone.

The Anatomy of Marriage

An Epithalamium

Consubstantiality, as much as blood,
The chemistry thereof seeks to bind her to me;
As when two swans struck white by sun,
Sinless as galleons, go sailing
Down that sweet river to its end.

O feel of dovesoft palms, O hands
That beg from touch a sacrament
Asking ungiveable alms;
Religious arms, O impossible lips,
When body, learning, will you know,
In this lachrymose dusk,
The only sign you will be given
Is the natural fission,
The religiosity of seem?

Ancestral Voices Prophesying War

Voice of an Old Man:

These lands inhabited by tribes
Rich with the bones of bison, bulge
Every spring, wheat shoots shine
In the green sun, gulleys gush
Water, and gulls hover over the land
Seeing the ocean. Birds see far.
They are omens. Watch for the high
And haughty hawk. See where he halts
On the air and drops, heavier than rain,
There the rodent runs. Beware of rats,
Weasels, badgers. When the doe runs
That is a rich spring and bushes bear fruit.
Count the numbers in the lead flock.
I have seen many springs. There are gods
In the land. Listen. The herd moves
Always together and strays fall.

Voice of a Young Man:

Mutterings of god in an old man's brain.
Geometrical and spare, the ice-hard lines
Are clear and still as frost, a metaphor
Of silence. My image is the water
On the still lake, hard as silver.
The word is pitch and pay, and oaths
As hard as clay, baked in the sun,
Fall on the prairie. It is a dray-horse
Of a land, all tendon and the froth
Of bitten steel upon its mouth.
See on its flanks the hard blue scars
Of time, the whip, and welts of dusty green.
See where the river sinks into the land.

Voice of a Woman:

Why are you making poems?
There are such things to be done.
Already it is spring, the flies buzz
By the oven, in the fields the land bakes,

Loaves quicken, and at night the moon is thin.
What priests are you to take the young
Into the fields at night and set them
Quarreling in their blood with voices
Of the wind, the trees, the river?
Where is my child? To which new tree
Nailed now?

Animals, Gods and Wise Men

Animals, gods and wise men
        and women who branch out like trees
    in great showers of words
        or whose feet are roots
    or who sway from the thighs like boughs
        or saplings in a wind

animals, gods and wise men
        and a forest of women in the spring
    whose thighs are like young trees
        bare of the gnarled bark of years
    or the knots of rings
    hooping the finger like a knuckled clock
        in the chronicle of spring

swaying around the pool
    the naked trees their arms
    embracing air their obscene roots
    the ground around the pool
    where weary in the heat of time
    the sweaty carter and his horse
            lie down and down beside them
    in the shade of boughs lie down
            animals, gods and wise men.

and limbs sweat: from her thighs
            a wise old naked tree sweats
cooling juices
          in the stream lie down to bathe
          their muscles knotted in the sweat of time
          animals, gods and wise men

Anna Dromeda

" Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce
For she koulde of that art the olde daunce."

Yon silly bird stretching in the queer Aprille twilight
Stares for a while, hath foreboding of shadows;
Folds ancient neck and head beneath a wing
As the green world goes under and the night-
Time is icumen in…

Lhude sings the owle

The wife puts up her hair in curls
While tapping her Sweet Cap against the tray
Examines teeth in her bright mirror, coils
Downward in an arc to pare a corn
With expert razor claws, inspects
Her nostrils, scratches at a thigh,
Unfolds the pillowcase, retires with a sigh.

Lady we are for the dark

Oh Harry you were king and promised me the world

The gentle cockroach, nervous arrow, slides
And scrapes in cracks along the wall;
Susie and Allan
Whisper in the hall

And here another faded soul goes by
With clawed feet trickling on the floor
While soute stars hath shone in darkness o'er
The moths that flit and totter on the glass
And night of stars and insects populate the grass.

Sweet girl (whose gat teeth scarce deplore
Thy budding mouth) Sweet girl
How wearily I lay me down by thee

Oh sweet king Harry night comes on

Enthroned in darkness wife she lay
With fairest Harolde by her side.
Encased in armour, he, the insect king
Went scuttling over mountains for his bride
Of twenty days, chattering like the cricket,
Bold was his boast for Anna, whom he'd free
With winged heels and countenance
That shineth as the aspect of the sea,
Full fair. With sails set to the north
The hero Harolde, childe of Rolande,
Mixed up his metaphors
And tottered forth.

Pearl nebulae, ring of stars,
Constellation of night enfolding my love and I;
Anna Dromeda lies in her bed and stares
At the stars with an acquisitive eye
And sings in her chains like the sea.

Anxiety

Kierkegaard & Heidegger:
        in the finger-nail file
        a tooth gleams
    northern pike slip the weeds
    and the mountain nods

out of the window a pail leans
    the water yellow in the sun
        shark in the prose
        takes chunks
    of the clambering bather

at the councilman's dance
    three spilled sentences
    lay in their stained syntax
        ashen words

the burning language reds the sea

Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

Hannah, my dear, do you hear how your voice has changed?
Your tonsils at night now speak by themselves
like false teeth clacking in a glass
like the limbs of an amputee
rattling about his room
while he dreams of full-bodied maidens
twirling their thighs around his astonished sex

voice of the locust
bearded woman's voice
voice of the camp castrati
scratchy pen's voice
blue voice in the rubber stamp
voice of the squeaking condom urging death
voice of the bidet
the sound of the journalist's flushing, flushing

Hannah, where are your woman's tears that should have
turned my *New Yorker* to pulp
and turned to pulp the letters in the bag
so that my Eaton's Account cried out
so that Calgary Power turned green with grief
so that the Jasper Sewer vomited red sorrow
so that, Hannah, letters showered upon me
a huge alphabet of limbs, eyes, teeth,
so that the letters of your grief spelled out
your grief

"for politics is not like the nursery"
nor is it a womb
nor is it an entrance nor an exit
nor the singing of Miriam on the shore
nor the cry of Klein in the second Gloss
nor is it a woman's voice
or a nipple
or the embracing limb
the wheeling world
the moon-lapping tide

Do you love him that you use his mouth
who should have sung how waters choked a king
and how before the lepers fell on you, clean limbed,
we counted Pharaoh's dead beside the bloody shores?

Argument

For the critic it was always plain sailing.
With a full wind his two master plunged ahead
And like the Pequod in the halcyon days
It was whaling whaling all the way.

But they never saw that snow-hill-white whale.
The wind was always right and fair.
More equators than Mercator dreamed of were crossed
And more stars than Copernicus dreamed of
Went by the dangerous swaying mast.

And all the while in the murderous rooms
At Twickenham and Strawberry Hill and Horton
And by that terrible table in the Mermaid Tavern
The poets kept talking and scratching out lines
More wicked than the undulating Cephalopod.

The first gleeman mouthing a ribald song
In that rollicking language played for a coin
And was thought less trouble than heroes.
And never he nor all the crowd knew
What a quarrel they had started in Webster's brain
Who, for example, would put Tourneur and Milton
In the same beer parlour to share a pint?

At Lidice

His blood flowed with theirs
        bestowing grace

Blond   dumb   open   broad
        stubborn   German   face
Afraid

Left alone
Left until last
Asking nothing
Demanding nothing
Promising nothing
Receiving nothing

knowing and unknowing
alive and dead
dead and alive

A Christ died on Calvary
A man died at Lidice
        knowing and unknowing

His blood flowing with ours
        bestowing grace

(In 1942, as a reprisal for the assassination of Heydrich, the Nazis destroyed "forever" the town of Lidice, population 700, by killing all the men, and deporting all the women and children and razing all the buildings. There is a legend that one German soldier refused to obey the order to shoot. He was warned that he himself would be shot unless he complied. He again refused and was murdered.)

The Axe-Murder Poems

"Lizzie Borden took an axe
Gave her mother forty wacks"

it was after all a resolution
   each time I struck her I knew
how to separate flesh from idea

this isnt the right language
to find her body her head
to understand

The Night of the Axe Murders

axe-murder poems become possibilities
   the question remains technical
how to write
                  whether precise
   knowledge should be part
   what kinds of axe to use
   where the blow is either more
   or less painful

I begin to consider possibilities

The Bach Preludes and Fugues

I

48 times he said this
which is 48 times the
elementary joy

those exercising hands
say
      lifted toward
      the tent's peak
      where the flags
      lag in listless
      circles
                  over and over
he says what he says
this equals that
            moon (say)
            crying
            about sun
            equals
                  sun
            crying
            about moon

or so, sometimes,
death is life
this rag-a-bag
woman
          kettle
          and pot
elementary joy
of knowing
the 48 deaths
are the 48 lives

II

I have gone at evening
among the tents of his music
seeing his clowns tumbling
in their circular pants
I have gone from his cinema
to his sculpture to his 48
pieces of 48 pieces
asking myself
about all that Israel
panting for its Samson
who found the dog-God
barking in the clowning God

III

Look, if my fingers could hold,
Before they fell from me, my roots,
My budding hands, the plums of summer,
The summer plums like eyes, like cars
Or car lights, purple, in the summer sun,
The flowering fingers of my hands
And the shabby 48 times my leafy hands
Let fall the summer from my hands
Do you think I would say this equals
Simply that, this moon, say, equals
Simply the summer sun, this pot
And these kettles equal simply

I would rather in our tents
He spoke to me of his father
And why he wanted to sing
Why he thought it was God to die
Or even to go back to that valley
Where the young bones shone
And the bright mules bled
Before the flowering plums
Before the final flowering sun.

Beach at Miraflores

From the high cliffs above Miraflores
Lima offers among its slovenly streets
Far from favellas festering like mud houses
a Boschian hell, its own demonology.
Consider the garbage of the rich
or at least the middle class, those with dogs
on their roofs, guardian shepherds of rich
Lebensroom: here the mess comes down
plastics, cardboard, condoms to the rhythm
of the sea it will wash out on Pacific tides
the mess, it will dissolve there in the mild
seas like the blood of the Incas, like the mud cities
that the Chimus built, like their gold labyrinths.

Here in the Regina library far beyond the gold,
the madness that the sun drove into Spanish minds
I hear an endless drone: this one learning languages,
that one grammar, that one how to read.
In Peru I thought I know these words:
put down the list of those taken by Conquistadors
to rooms of torture or those the Inquisition took
to pieces bone by tendoned bone. The prairie night
grows deadlier in its cold. I listen to the dark
come on, words drifting like garbage from the cliffs
of Lima, poisoned city: "I wonder what lies ahead."
So little to say. So little to learn.
Only the deaths of the inevitable story.

The Beauty of Pure Act as the Final Cause

1

Act

beside a pillar
a torn dress

in a pool of light
a blunt spear
tipped with hair

like this sun porch
the hottest sun
is watered by the evening light

2

Pure Act

the blind window sees the widow
in her act
winnowing the spear

she steps into a pool of light
scatters the sun's grain

3

Final Cause

a bird breaks loose from a stone
the bird-faced lady like a tree
shudders in a splurge of light

she spills a pearl upon my porch.

Betrayal Beginning in Dreams

To the memory of Delmore Schwartz

let muzhik assure you   volk
when those seven silk consonants
tangled around the heart
of one ruptured vowel
half down in the elevator
of the columbia hotel in new york city
and the great rabbit fell
against all the buttons
including *emergency*   and *open*
he saw it all then
clearer than a honed diamond
that if
in dreams begin responsibilities
and we are all sometimes icons
though certainly not a movie
then one's life ends with
betrayal beginning in dreams

ah volk
if dreams were only a wolf
that knows the pissedbleached coordinates
of its boundaries
if all games
                were as simple
                as a young boy
                in the evening grass
                he murmuring to a young girl
                trembling in fear where
                the sun stains
                her thin
                          thigh

    "don't cry… let me inside you
    i will stop the bleeding"

if myth were as simple
as the two drunken brothers
who reportedly
threw the bride from the *troika*
to pursuing wolves

if magic were as simple
as the left hand flashing out to encompass
the fly
the captor a granite stare straight ahead
if betrayal were as simple
as wind rising
when the tightrope walker
reaches halfway
if it were all as simple
as the first glimmerings in the left eye
of your dearest friend
who lighting your wife's cigarette
after love
as they sit up when you are out of town
thinks
i know so much
...about him now
the trick...not to get caught
getting away with it
a kind of magic!

if the heart's hattrick
were all this simple
there would be nothing volk
nothing
to worry about
or suffer in the clarity of things
during insomnia

but we secretly know volk
it's all myth
and words
muzhik believing only
in a world of real people
and those who know
the smell of earth
just after a rain

and a place
where one is born first
and named later

do you remember volk
the story muzhik told us?
the nameless woman from illinois
once raped and beaten
along a rural road during the depression
the woman who forgot her name
during multiple shock treatments
to calm her
in various insane asylums
and was finally transferred
to a nursing home
where mrs shroud recalled

> "She wouldn't let men near her.
> She was terrified of men.
> She shook constantly from 50
> years of medication, but appeared
> to enjoy her new freedom
> from mental institutions,
> wearing a ragged pink sweater
> as she walked around the
> nursing home even in rainstorms."

she died last year
at 71 and yesterday
the state of illinois
buried a nameless urn
of ashes
that's the *real* world
going about its own business
volk the imagination
doesn't stand a chance!

volk we know the realities
that while our mothers walked the margins
of those dark forests
in an old country
from *selo* to *selo*
to work

wolves' smouldering eyes moving
in the shadow of fear
didn't smoulder for woman
but only for the ruffian
and his sordid companions
who believed there was something
to get away with

and yes volk
that prairie magician's line
that always fascinated us so much

"now folks jis watch real close
cause yeh know the hand's
faster than the eye—that's why
yeh see so many black eyes
hee hee hee!"

the line was pure bullshit!
a myth from the american west
the fastest hand
a myth that became an earwig
crawling into the ear
and boring into the brain
of a sleeping gunman
who wakened to become golem's automaton
volk we know *the fastest hand*
is nothing at all
nothing
and that the magic beyond all magic
deals not in cards
but in the perfect magic of words
and linguistic tricks
where humour can make people laugh so hard
they cry
as the magician guest
vanishes
with the finest
oriental vase
casually tucked
in his pocket

muzhik!   you're joshing me now!
try it volk
try it anytime   anywhere
it works everytime
you can steal crystal wine glasses this way
the finest silver is yours
i've even seen them exit
with a friend's wife

but if muzhik can return for a moment
to *serious* matters   volk
you know that friendship is at least
as fragile as glass
and that anyone can form a fist
in mercurial rage
and turn a picture window
into a spider web
during that split second
of impact
              the left   or right hand
              do the job
              equally well
              but it takes something else
              another kind of person
              and voice
              to sustain a single note
              powerful enough
              to shatter glass

the trick of all tricks   volk
is not what the man in darkness
that makes him you
speaks
in the fear of discovery
        but the poem's hattrick
        on the margins
        of betrayal
        guilt
        and responsibility to dreams
        where a single
                        misplaced word
        can break
                           the heart

Cabbages and Trees

The peculiarities of death
   and its extravagance
like a shopkeeper's manual
are not what I had bargained for

are not the steadiness of breath,
   my heart's acceptable dance.

I thought perennial not annual
   trees were planted here
      were what we grew
but death has branches too.

Chair

For P.S.

We moved into the airless space
Between the table and the chair.
While standing there with all the grace
Of footmen, who with livery wear
The faceless air of vacant space,

We wondered if the ouija board
Would help us hear, or help us see,
The levitating table scored
And humbled with the knocking knee.
"Yes," we said; "No," said the board.

We turned from magic, where the wall
Held all the algebra of air,
Back to the geometric hall,
Which led us from the cushioned chair
To day, and there there was no wall.

"Maybe," said the table,
"Maybe you are able."
"Never," said the chair,
"You would never dare."
But the airless space,
From an aching void,
Only made a face:
And that we enjoyed.

Chelydra Serpentina

Ironic in his house of bone
this turtle hoists a skeleton
one hundred years or more in mud
always the ice of hate his blood
cousin in name to singing dove
without that turtle's house of love
the naked serpent in the bone
Ironic in his house of stone

Cold Pastorals

When I scorned the new architecture
        (refused to pray at its masses)

and when in the understandable ground
        a silver tree blossomed

I saw that my companions
        were truly Norwegian
        fiercer than walrus.

Over the land where they ran
        Welsh villages crumbled
        and stones were flung
        into the Druidical sun.

You will say the lass
        whom we buried in Norway
        never existed
No architects mass
        buried her. No one shrieked.

But when the Norwegians run
        and when there is again
        a silver tree, in the day
        dying, she will walk on
        no print shown,
        a white, simple lawn.

The Criminal Element

In the ecclesiastical night
    robed like a bishop
    or a wizard
                    not even grasshoppers awake
somewhere a saint unrobed herself
bathed from a dipper, came out fire
as though she contained stars.

I rubbed myself awake
                no longer congregational
                myself unorbited about hymns
                fled into the startling planet
                called by no universal name.

Compatriots in pity
in the chains of office
sang official anthems.

                No one understood
                no one knew
                no one heard
the other song, ancient as fire
when the last mayor but one
went Indian and scalped his councillors,
three secretaries, and the incumbent
elected by the reform administration,
whose motto (under God) was:
            "Time for a change
            clean government
            sewers for every home
            Time for a change."

The Dark Chapel

someway into the wilderness
        north of Estevan
        on route 39
                contemptuous of meaning
                left behind
                with the orators
                with the parliamentarians
only the highway now
a ribbon, a snake
                whatever the critics say
                since there was no choice
                never any real choice
only the town suddenly behind
                despicable, squat,
                a huddle of shacks
and the king murmuring about harps,
evil angels, quoting Browning's
Childe Roland or acting like Saul
in the caves, in the dark valley
the Souris, mean source,
river of frogs
                    a croaked song
Ezra says,
                sunset and grasshoppers flying

What will you do then with the road
down which the memorable dead
travel like crooked fathers?
Humped in the valley, fathers,
who avoided politics
who gained the crooked image

The Daze of Men like Suns

When vanity superbly finishes the sea,
As silent as the sun retracts its gaze,
Our eyes bereaved no longer cling, without
That ancient prodigal, our infancy.

When we are done, both lip and eyebrow spent,
Mouth clasped, the dusk evolved about,
(It is not long and you will cry to go)
Think how the silent other went…

Gone to the sea, our prodigal, plunged
Silent in the salt, a red rage broke his brain.
He gazed too long, went blind withal
And left a bright confession of his pain.

Well think how marygold the summer waits.
Console his service with a gorgeous love like lips.
"What sets today will rise tomorrow."
Only the silent sea returns and laps

Up to the night… the waves will bind the glare
And turn the vain and smirking sea about;
Tides wash a fabled shadow back and forth
And from it, only murder will come out.

Not suns, the sea gives back, that took the waves,
Broke, went beneath; only the drowned man's bones,
Death's bounty, blood on sand will lie,
A scattered alphabet which no one owns.

The Death of the Morning

he remembered sunlight

The golden shower must have been like rain,
For when a world is bathed in such a light
The eye is blind. It seems as if the brain
Is touched by the feel of things in its own right.

he remembered sunlight on a wall

The texture of things is more than in the mind;
The fire burns forever on the sand;
When flame no longer is, it burns behind
The optic nerve, beyond the feeling hand.

he remembered a wall near a street

Down in the dung a pigeon flutters,
Ruffling his feathers under the rain,
And scratching for seed in the sand.

he remembered a street to a river

The water is running away in the gutters;
The wind is blowing about in the brain;
St. Elmo bathes the lifted hand.

he remembered river, street and wall
he remembered sunlight
he remembered nothing at all

A Dialogue of the Body and the Soul

Body: Good light, my friend, I am for the dark
Where, save a dream, imitating death
I'll sleep this night away from you.

Soul: And yet there is the sea of sleep within your eyes,
Who knows what fish you'll find when you have left
And lost this shore of senses? Now you'll sail
From ghost to ghost within your left and lost past.
Happy voyage—and surprise.

Body: Avoid the moral; stay, and hear the lightfall
Now it's filled with stirs.

Soul: That's eve's ring you hear.
From nightchime through moonday a wedding of the sun
And moon has filled the air with song
From house to hilltip, school to skill, top to toe

Body: And desk to doom.

Soul: A clown from your red birth
To your black death, all mouth and motion;
Peristalsis and paralysis, the twin pillars
Of your creation and redemption; a muscle
Twitching through eternity…

Body: Leave off,
Eternity? Your holy day has failed,
Each comes at last to its weak end,
A day of haplessness, a sun day
Gone into night from nurse to bed.

Soul: It's so within the circle that you please
To travel in, a five-laned highway of the senses,
Why think that you have seen the mind's whole country?

Body: I see what is to be seen. At night
I only want to rest; the rest is silence,
Save a dream.

Soul: Which I save for you.
Arterial roads to the heart of a city,
A vain way when I am winged, and fury
Is the flight and free…

Body: Icarus?

Soul: Yes, and not the Minotaur. You pace
From cell to cell, bolted by bones;
Your own prison and the mind-forged manacles
I see upon you. You have no spirit
Or you would be free. You have no spirit
Except me.

Body: I have a nose for non-sense though.

Soul: Yes, and your world smells for it too.
To be hung in cartilage, framed in flesh,
And stuck between two jellies ringed with hair
And sticky with old tears for griefs I name,
To be dragged down into mankind…

Body: Now wait. What keeps you upright? Being
Fastened to my feet. I am a cliff you hang upon,
Don't push me or you'll fall. And think on this:
For me, the horizontal man, love
Is always vertical and I must stoop to it.

Soul: Play all those angles, make a cross, but think on this:
Your sodden heart, soaked in its own blood, and beating
Like a drum thuds in my ears too. I'm deaf with it.
I'm blinded with your eyes.

Body: Now who's at sea?
Give over, for I'll never rest. It is enough
That day by die I must trip forward
And must always make me from what's always at my back
And that I'm never what I'll be but what I was.
Where's thought for that? Take all the time you want,
But let me rest.

Soul: Poor spectre time,
The haunt of those who watched him. Turn your back on him
And see he isn't there.

Body: And lose myself?
I'd rather have him, bones and all,
Than be a ghost myself. We shouldn't have named him.
Look, the night is pale and tired. Doom is almost here.
The bird of yawning now it seems has flown.

Soul: Night after light and you'll be deaf and blind and dumb
Through noons of sun for all the pasts to come.

Body: Night into day and day becoming light.
Good light, good friend, good light.

Soul: Good die, you mean, the doom is almost here.
Good die, my friend, till dawnsdays reappear.

Body: Good die, my friend, till life do us part.

Soul: Good die.

Body: Good die.

Edmonton's Streets Are Numbered

8400-15000
is a street
I have no story of
no way
this street becomes god
or god's way
(I mean destruction's way
or a slough, the sun sunk,
the pool a hive of eyes
I mean
despair on the street
in the narrow way
the people shrunk
small as a fist
faces like fists
and muscles wound
all over their thin bones
like vines around trees
or ropes of greed
I once saw a tailor sew
for a town of friends
who put a kettle on my head)

unstoried street
winds into (no) destruction
(no) grief
(no) kettle of
fried-
(the shrunk fish, dead
three days lay on the murky
sun-left sand-stuck lively
with flies shore
deft with death

I could not swallow)

only the snow, white explosion,
kills for my daughter
fishful of summer

          and the unstoried houses
a fistful
                    a cat sniffs
a whole summer of fish
whose skeleton lies
                    a tin (awry)
                                        kettle

Epitaph

These removed from context are
The unpunishable dead
Their meaning is
Not a glory from afar

Now unambiguous they lay
Like headstones heads away

And they are ungrammatical
A few confusions
What their pursed lips say
Is said
And is not glory

Oh they are far from language
Though they lie
In our best poetry

Now unambiguous they lay
Like headstones heads away

Experiment with Arabesque, Attar of Roses, and Shaving Lotion

One saint I've seen
who could walk on water.

He was bug-eyed and bow-legged.

Antic and nimble
He disposed me to worship,
A contortion
that threw my limbs
Into exceptional joints
Among other bugs.

I still limp on feast days,
stare long at filmy pools,
am wary of boots and fishermen.

Often I dream of drowning.

And sometimes think
a rotting fruit
has lodged in my side.

* * *

the bard within me keeps his peace

exotic in attar the pink frail
dangles pails of rings
I expect never to sing again
some of my friends dream of spit
others of a far country

look how the teasle and the water bug
scatter the elements, one walks
like a bow-legged saint over the waves
shall I worship him

cataracts of cumulus are nimble northward
but the air, my lord, weighs on me
like a blue goose-feather quilt
and the traffic streams like a storm
down gulleys of liquid tar

whom shall I praise
when the bulldozer jack-knifes the trailer
when the bug-eyed cars bulge and burst
and out of wrenched doors stream
the innards

Sinbad slew a heart in a tower
nembutal purpled the face of a ponce

* * *

I walk along the loam and clay
most of my friends have chastised me
toward the north the land is grey
the word is immorality

capricious cumulus is nimble where
three friends spoke solemnly
over the blue goose-feather air
the word is immorality

look where the teasle and the water bugs
scatter the elements, I say,
my friends are solemn in their rags
the word is immorality

one bug-eyed bow-legged saint
walks the waves incessantly
endless is my friends' complaint
the word is immorality

exotic in attar one pink frail
dangles his rings, his finery…

Expostulation and Reply

Unto my enmity give cause, your Honour
While lawyer-like I powder hair and curls,
Adjust my passions on my robe
And wear my conscience as a wig of morals.

1

Remembering man in the hooked net struggling like fish,
Fin and frantic body lashing the roped cruel skein;
Or in a stupor, stunned and desolate, lying upon the deck,
With a last desultory lunge slipping from freedom

Where in the long wet sea was to be free and wet
For the shark's mouth and the black coiled squib
And the sucking arms; between fisherman and fury
Caught, suspended between sea and air, not amphibious;

Who desired to fly and scarcely yet could swim;
Remembering man like salmon in a massed pack
All alive amid the slapping of body to body,

Would you be elite, clean, singing to flowers, marvellous,
Innocent, darling sheep-herder, flock tender,
Watching for stars and the straining hymn on the meadow;

Or be film-eyed, staring, flopping among others, fish,
While framed in flesh song gropes from gaping mouth?

2

Now must mind not only delight with aspect of war,
Denuded and not virgin proceed to arms;
But certainly no longer laughing among lambs
Be a horticulturalist or lover of flowers

Or with a long and crooked stave guide herds,
Or being herded, in the huddled warmth delight.

For a fever comes on and in the sick silver rising
Of thermometer, traces the quarrel of blood
The muttering worry of pulse

Where vision comes only to the staring eye
Bloodshot from gazing too long at the sun
Or those whitened and turned inward to the fretful mind
Where birds go with their delicate innocent feet

And where grows the moist foetus uncurling
To push from love, fish, ape to mind and man
Is that strained song, more important than murder,
Than the bleeding of man, than liberation,
Almost more important than the poet himself.

Fable

Beyond the city's wreck, we reached the plains.
Everything will be all right now, I was told.
There is nothing to fear. The way
Lies northward till you reach the cold.

The Mayor and his Councillors, rolled
In parkas of the finest fur you'd find
South of the fur belt, a sort of rabbit,
Hurried past me, teeth bare in the wind.
I cried after them, but one said, Never mind,
You know we cant stop here,
We have the mines upon our list today.

They dwindled into balls of fur
And later, hopping back, in a rage of fear
They hurried past me, crying: Please beware
The Caribou, They're moving south in herds.
It wasnt Caribou. It was birds.

Flocks came out of the north
Like a convention of Episcopalian
Ministers, all black with white bands
Around their throats, and they called to me,
The gold, the gold.

I thought perhaps they meant go south.
After all, perhaps there the green goat,
With his wineskin, leaps in the garden.
But I was wrong.

For they were childish birds,
Their thin collars clutched about their throats,
I heard them shrieking in small voices:
The Mayor and his Ministers cant be wrong.
And I knew the way was northward, and the end
Just as it had been foretold.

Fairy Tale

common miss jennifer dreaming in the gold sun-
light, flaxen miss jennifer with her coiledyellow hair;
two bumpy palms turned up begging for a prince
miss jennifer dreams in the goldsun

and twelve strong years put arms around her
rubbed fire in her thighs and with a splash
went like a goldfish, left a mist in her eyes
those pale wet blue eyes

well fortunately she never knew prince george
grimy george with his muscular legs
who tupped seven girls and rubbed his hairy palms
and gave them silver for alms.

Fake

I think of you
practicing his signature
imitating his voice
that scrambled syntax

maybe one night
the thought comes furiously
he is writing your autobiography

on that truth
the Republic itself founders
and my dominion

Art   after all
                denies us
knowing
            prisons (prove) real

The Familiar Wakening

you wake again to the familiar dark
and the meticulous survey begins:
tax accounts in numbers you couldnt dream of
lectures whose structure defies your memory
in the sodden coasts of your bed
you lie streaming with guilt

Fear and Trembling

Innocent faces are not innocent
And the simple eye reveals
The signal glance, the signal sent
Confirming witnesses' intent.
Into the corners where extend
Ends of the interlocking web
The insect hand of law explores,
Exploring shakes the centre, where,
Bearded and golden as the sun,
Crouches the cancerous spider.

Flood Scene

Night long the poor were praying in the house
That wept and sank its timbers in this sand
The intermittent sound of prayer rose on the land
Like waves collapsing into sand

Arcless, the lapse was present in their sinking eyes:
Old sockets, shocked by loss, flared only once
Before collapsing into blackened rims of ruin
The town and all the people wavered in the flood

Sunk here, below, above the waves, I hear
The whispers coming up, watered and shoaled,
Like shells rimming a total history of bone

Over the total waste as once before
Now see the basket sky append
An egg below to hatch each morning
Morning's opening and end
Gold wickered in a pompous cage
An age of luminosity, a light that's dying
All light's lying here.

From "The Memoirs of a Public Accountant"

You see then to what we have come. The street angles and tilts,
houses dangling now over the edge of a chasm while
within the earthquaking town the casual stranger tilts
his hat and the sun, his hair pleasant and yellow as wheat,
draws himself into a child's serene face. What are we to
make of such contradictions? I have a daughter who sings
and who runs, who takes the sun in her hands and tosses it
like a ball over the side of my house and catches the moon
on the other side and tosses it back to the other side, and
a son who drives giant animals to his will and with his palms
slays enormous machines and eats various-coloured people.
You would be surprised to know what words I have not said to my
colleagues, and how many times I have stood shivering before
a storm that did not happen, the thunderous strokes of a pen
shaking the floor. Of course, nothing of this is in any way
an excuse or an offering. Too terrible to contemplate what
I have already given to the insatiable officers. How else
can I explain? There were the sailors. If I admitted that?
Or told everything about the women? Or noted even more carefully
what the lecturer was saying, transcribing every word in my
notebook? Nothing will do now except to admit what cannot be said.
The day is already gone and I walk toward the gates which will
shut only once.
I refuse to blame the others.
I refuse to blame myself.
I refuse to accept the official explanation.
I refuse to blame the children.
Nothing more is possible except to refuse, the forming word unsaid
and unspeakable the speechless image that will fall like fire
upon the very gates when the furnace itself at the end comes
up to be the crown.

A Fragment

And silently the streets stalked after me
And I was small and grey beneath their stare,
Sorrow sped down and burst the veil of air
And shadows leaped, and swallows fled from me.

And did the night sing once, then die
As bolts of flame raced over futile blue
And was the world a chorus too
And what did sudden voices there imply?

Blinded, the moon fell from the sky
Tall buildings stood, then rushed apart
And secret to the dark's unerring eye
A blasphemy unveiled its heart.

Published in *The Students' Standard*, 30 March, 1946

A Fragment

Dark girl, whom I lay lately down beside,
Who was the material of fleeing flame
The unexpected bright guardian of the substance of day,
In whose eyes, in whose dusty glance, fallen to the ground
Lay, as the moon lay, a sleeping allegory…

And there are roses the color of blood,
There are flowers that must have wept petals
And dawn dew at the absence of night

Though I have been mapping ceaselessly
Such terrain, whitening the unexplored country:
While she is the color of rose
She is a black rose…

Look into my eyes that have cried
Because time wastes with scorn
A black rose.

A Gloss of Poems

(Remembering Abe Klein)

1

Break down the twigs, break down the boughs
But break not, Lord, the golden bowl.
(A.K.)

My body is tree
my reaching boughs and twigs
are skeleton
meant to be
broken by stone
by shouldering snow
splintered by rain
cracked by the fingering frost

My body is given, Lord
to show Thy ways
I read where my roots go
assess the green
count leaves' ascension
into heaven's blaze

This will I willingly
submit to Thee:
my skeleton,
my tree.

2

And lives alone, and in his secret shines
like phosphorous. At the bottom of the sea.
(A.K.)

Drowned? Were you the one
drowned
or do I dream again
and do I hold again your hand across a table
in a Chinese restaurant
hand reaching to affirm
against the goyem laughter?

A drowned man now… Your hand
that delicate instrument
long servant to
the fervent ferment of thought
your hand lies twitching out
a spider's mark
on the bare table

And in the hive, your head
the golden bowl,
bees buzz and bumble
fumble for honey amidst empty cells
where the slain poems
wingless, tremble.

A Gothic Tale

I watched them for an afternoon
that simple Greek and stubborn monk
under the market-hunting sun
under the cul-de-sac, the moon.

You would not think a clown in brown,
a monk of fashion, townish monk,
gloved in the cloth of Orient,
modish in lamb of Asian mode

could fence that simple Greek around
with blatant fashion, point of lace,
such is the pride of market-place,
such is the monkish pride of play.

The lance that tumbled him to mud,
O wicked lance, O fashioned play,
broke Thebes, shook Greece, sprayed
pigeon feathers red with pigeon blood

over a jovial sky and cracked the pate
of heaven like an egg, with lance
as sharp as steeple, then it put
my Grecian knight into the bloody mud.

Well, who will protect us now
from sights that we must see?
Truth has its fashions in the market-place
ladies will wear this monkish lace

but Lady Moon is cracked by fashion
and I may grieve for her
she was whiter by far than any monk
and easy with her favours.

The Head of Orpheus Floating Upon the River Hebrus Speaks This:

It is, of course, the chance missed,
But more, remembering why it was done.
On the voyage no one was annoyed
While I was singing. It was good enough
Then to make songs about trees
Who were lovely women, about the winds
Who were old men, and a god in the sky.
After they had the fleece, they became
Different somehow. Music wasn't enough.

It is the chance missed, you have no way
Of knowing this, not at the time, not when
The scroll is handed you, the judges
In their robes of black brocade look down
Expectantly, the crowd is silent.
From the hall a murmur as you stand
And look about, a question in your eyes.

Remember those who turned away in shame,
And then the twisted muscle in your face,
The jeering mouths, the prancing youth
Who then recited poem after poem:
About the new god too, the river
Rising as he received his laurels, the voices
After this in brooks and trees,
And in the north the steady rain that fell.

Something about Dionysius. It wasn't clear.
You'd swear this was the verse that you
Had sung before. Who knew about the mudbank?
How many galleys had passed by this year?
Why was there weeping in the city?
Who could have known about the poison in the drink?
The torches of the funerals burned all that day
Upon your eyes. I think they did say Plato,
But I cant be sure. It may have been Pythagoras.

It is the chance missed. Of course it's that.
Not all the other signs, not what was said
About a birthmark on your temple, the prophecy
About your mother, the sickness in the city,
Not one of these had mattered in the end.
It was the prize first, the fleece,
And then the wreck that followed.

Homage to Ezra Pound

(Mad, fascist and traitor in Italy)

I

So   of your sixty-three years   you
are an old man scrabbling verses
peevishly the old cantilations
are sung   in a cracked voice

in a dim room crouched on the floor
legs crossed   singing out the song
of laws   nor yet will they leave   you
alone

in the sixty-third year of your life

Votre age M'sieu Pound demands not
nor gives praise for the urn
the still vase within the vase that
moves   the porcelain that shines
even the image and most certainly

not for the youngest song of the lot
clothed in its vestments of Chinese
Persian   heraclitian   gold not praised
or even sung well in our time.

II

Except for me who pays homage
and I I am bourgeoise and Jew
mad also as you are
                    by our time

is this not satisfaction enough
most subtle irony of all
I am of that darned clever bunch
who will say homage

even from the usurous lot
Shylocks clothed in a Shiffer-Hillman
or a one button roll taking
in my hands your songs
and asking the crowd to begin

III

For Pound we owe you the explanation
on a night I have seen ivory hands
curl and tap on the arms of chairs
I have seen Egyptian faces
and most prodigal of all these times
have seen
        islands poets drowned bridges

for twenty-six years allied myself
with the just cause
not enough for twenty-six years
begged a question of the time
of the crosslegged poets on floors
in asylums through three centuries
and a dozen continents

returned to the universal values
not enough for twenty-six years
also was among the armed
and the adventurous
went with the old prostitute
on her best time when her price

was much higher than the one she asked
of yours and you were on the other side
venting your spleen oh redbearded one
against myself

and it all came back to a table
with the man across saying
"you must accept all the facets of life
nor reject any part thereof"

IV

returned to singing the ivory hands
the egyptian face the body
which was so slow as a panther
returned to the female mind
in the dark whirlpool with its supple
and subtle turning slow and dear

sang with the mouth and the arms
and repeated the phrases
all things save the mystery of
the eyes repeated all things save
thy lips

asking was twenty-six years enough
for the praise of an urn and a regalia
for the clothes I give my songs
and yours   for the contempt
of the wrong so obviously
done not only to you but to our time
by those suffering from that wrong

the bourgeoise and the contented
trouble both mine and your thoughts
was it enough that of all the praises
after the insults there should only be
the one singing

for either your sixty-three or my
own twenty-six years

Horrible Workers—Rimbaud

Look on that pearl-edged city where
Dawn took you by the throat
And tell us now that Phoebe is a war,
Son of Horizons, whose verse is still a threat.

Now where you loved, that great assassination
Is gone good-sacred-hearted; neatly fashioned,
Now a pleasant seeing, fathoms above in a framed action,
Pearled to eternity; and all who are unvisioned

Are fashionable, see dawn in a cyclical glory
Like fish, or young chickens, or jellied things
As gleaming brains of men go by
Over the shore where your straddled shadow hangs.

It will be no effect of legends that
Those fall on your horizons, those eyes
That are abandoned engines, a soft hat,
A curled hand caressing a paper agony.

But without story though the day elapses,
Suns continuing, in a legendless land,
Horrible workers, we set out to your horizon of ellipses,
The unseen being of your eyed mind.

Husks of Things

For E.A.

Were he like the carapace,
Man could never run his race,
Armoured, brightly, to the hilt.
All this greenness, all this gilt,
Could claw Eden down, and track
Golden apples back and back,
To the time it dawned on Eve:
Spilt milk's not a thing to grieve
For.
        Remember:
                                blame the ram,
And anyway, who cares a damn.
Fame is the spur no cock can know—
Or knight—or where the hens all go
After egging time is past.
Only food's the thing will last
From this dinnertime to that—
Or so it seemed from where he sat,
Musing on the ruin of race,
And the kindly carapace.

[I thought I had killed the revolution]

I thought I had killed the revolution
    with a proposition
    but a phrase leaped from the table
    and laying about with a word
left the headless committee
    in parts, like unpassed motions
    the amendments bleeding at their stumps.

Journal Poem

September, 1986, the poet defines himself,
his Canadian loyalties
    outside of himself (in America)
    outside of himself (in the Caribbean,
    an adjudicator for a Commonwealth
    Poetry Prize)
    (America—hyper-reality, an Italian
    definition by Umberto Eco)
    (Commonwealth)

The Canadian poet flees south in the fall,
brief stopover at Miami International Airport, and goes
on to Kingston, Jamaica.

I

Stroke

Bodily functions: Stroke July 1, 1986:
Canada Day: the world replaces itself by means of
a perceptual realignment.
So we all meet our own mortality
I didn't know it would be so difficult
only a poem, a new proprioception: location
of the extension of self in relation to space
but also subdural haematoma, the hard mother
(tr. Arabic) encasing the brain allows a small
blood seepage
hard mother. Relations between things
close by Dung cart
    Dungeon
    Dunghill
    Dungy
    Dunnage
    Dunstable
The world turns over south as north, East? West
Whenever there is a november in my soul

I seek out mild winters. Call me Ishmael
drawn to solipsistic pools
   dreaming south
The lullaby winds gentle soft evenings
Palms whispering
hallucinating
   Great God, the ship!
         the ship!
Allegory of body and soul
amid luxurious blossoming trees
Ataxia
   Pathological. Irregularities of animal
functions
   of the symptoms of disease
inability
   to co-ordinate voluntary movements
hence unbalanced. UnCanadian.
My left arm leaps out and salutes
an invisible officer.
Diplopic—an affection of the eyes in which
objects are seen as double.
   Hard mother
   The virtual image.
   (not really here)
Who is that lying at my feet?
The floor become the ceiling.
   This is not political.
We were taught by our last PM (Trudeau)
not to seek to
avoid revolution. The body turns over. Vertigo.
logically there is no one there
certainly not this colored body
this voluptuous woman.
this dreaming south.

II

Miami Vice: *Hyper-reality*

Taken by the word *International,*
He feels important,
   especially because the airport
is high-tech,
   the floor escalator
   takes us
   to an elevator that is a bus terminal
   announcing itself
   he becomes an international poet
arriving
   to seek out his luggage he must
   speak to security:
   a bulky southern policeman
who drawls
   "Sonny, we don't handle Toronto passengers
   only Dade County travelers"
   local once more
   two colored policemen
   they are everywhere
tell him
   "Sonny, where is your briefcase?"
   I left it here when I went to the phone.
   "It's not here now. *We* put it over there.
   Don't leave things unattended. This is
   An International Airport." They chuckle.
He sees T-shirts. 10,000 maybe. All inscribed
in the art deco mode. *Miami Vice,*
Has a beer at the art deco lounge neon-marked *lounge,*
Next *Miami Vice,* he sees
the study of a woman policeman
who loves a passing terrorist
of the IRA
   later blown up
   by his own illicit explosives.
He feels important. International.
The Canadian Vice

III

Kingston

Met at Kingston airport by Eddy Baugh,
professor of English of the University of West Indies,
Gentle colored.
   At Linguanea Club where he reserved a room for us.
Air conditioned. We met for dinner.
Under the trees. In the rich blooming garden.
He recalls a poem by Layton:
   "Anglo-Canadian"
   "A native of Kingston, Ont.
   Now his accent
   makes even Englishmen
   wince and feel
   unspeakably colonial."
The shredded remnant
of speech
and diction
All my wretched poetry still writing me
in the midst of these evasions
and all the denials.
   The Canadian Vice.

Published in *The Financial Post*, November 24, 1986

The Mermaid

do the elements mingle in the sea
or what words in the water
could we say
                  woman
whose hair lifts like the sun
itself floating in the waves

she is the sea's mild image
her dolphin-mind

Message to Be Left in the Basement
Next to Mine Dug Last Sunday

not what you think; not thermonuclear
nor ice
        not insects nor the anger
of the god in whom we no longer
believe but the usual signs
of age
        the wet eyes (the CBC
news announcer blurred) the
loose groin and the pain
over the left back
                a crack
in the voice and diminished use
of
        also the weather is peculiar
        there has been no spring

        the teachers are not able
        to say literature is useless
        to those who chant the new songs

also if you do not look directly
        but slantwise you will see
        (some say headlights
        and great automobiles;
        some say the flash of
        horns and the black muscles
        of

there have been mailed men seen

and a corpulent poet who sailed here in
a bottle

Nervada: Nirvana

a spent afternoon
                    and light
twirling away like silver dollars
                    a desert
of clouds like cactus and
the red casino of the sun
flashing its neon
                    a last
turn of the wheel
                    before
a night darker than bourbon

who dreams of managing the sun

one loop of roulette to rope
its barbarous horses
                         and a ride
through a night where seven stars
twinkle like spots on the dice.

North-West Passage

We have sailed a thousand times into their fame.
No matter how we launch, or how implore,
Though the ship is always called a different name,
The breaking champagne bubbles are the same,
And it's always the same view of the dwindling shore.

A coastline never should be quite like this,
With such dull gulls, floating in the mind,
Voyaging should be terror, excitement, bliss,
Not a routine enchantment, with the hiss
Of flaccid water drifting out behind.

But that is how it is: *c'est la guerre*,
And say whatever else you choose to tell;
Only the gulls will hear you, in the dull air,
And certainly such gulls could not care,
And besides there is only the sea, and the fish smell.

There is only the sea—and that shrieking gull—
And, yes, the launching, and the dabbling foam:
And we're out on the waves, all sail and mast and hull,
And only the sky is flat and grey and dull,
And only we know whether we're going home.

Notes from the Diary of a Junior Executive

I suppose the grippe killed a few
    but the rest travelled in hordes
    and resisted it or colds or smallpox.

I saw them with the ravel of sweaters
    and coats from 1929 or string dresses
    the beads shaking and glittering
and their eyes glittering like the beads.

Somebody said it was 1412 and the cities
    were burning all along the coast
    that rape was common and the prows
    of their longboats in every harbour
peered over the church towers like dragons.

The Pope began to smell from his high fever
    something like Gordon's gin or cheap
    scotch or orange and bitters and rent
    shot sky high only a month before the crash.

Now Boast Thee Death

There were seene certaine fresh steppes or trackes
where it had gone on the tombe side toward the sea.
(Plutarch)

The queen's robes, the confined breast, the girdled
thighs, upon a throne of senses, crowned by mind
and chambered with desire in the curtained tomb,
is offered him, a royal puzzle.
                                        Busily unties her life.
Tastes her, upon her nipple, on her arm. Her life
still warm as bourbon nurses him to drink,
it dangles from his bitings like an unwrapped knot.
He staggers with it past the ice-cube rocks,
the bourbon-coloured sea, the reeling planets.

Leaves tracks like tucks upon the blanket of the beach
sewing his seam to the venomous sea.

Nude

More dangerous than batons of emotion
twirling covered breasts of girls
like cubist nudes down staircased streets,
and fiercer than the midway thighs in beads
like nineteen-twenty living rooms stuffed
with Victorian chairs and bosomed ancient
aunts and boyish mothers strapped and flat
and hipless, these layers of oil lathered
to the inert planes of thought, the unconsuming
fire, the safe fire of colour.
                                        Still, momentous
as equations in a book of force, a torque
of thighs, it spins abstractions of its own
desires, quick black diagrams of a self
no longer bone but thought coloured
to the shape of bone or bone to shape
of flower.

Poem

Followed the lewd trains lurching to the city
The houses cringing, the blue smoke's frayed unwinding spools
The rail rackets shrieking nerve at close curve spills
Bemoaned the rocket's rabid gluttony of pity

Raged riot then. Turned snow storms inside out
Tore sunsets down and stuffed with hapless glee
The dark lane's garbage pail. Ran then to flout
At the rain red edge of cliffs the raving self
And with a great contempt, spit in the sea.

Raged useless until spent, crawled to a corner
From sudden heaving of the ground, and resting
Wretched, huddled there. Feared the storm growing
The plunging waves of paranoic winter.

Watched from a corner minutes, plucked and flung
With an insane leaping panic twisted, hurled
Bruising space in their mad path and wrong
And as a leaf in dying, inward curled:

Followed with aching eyes their cruel singing
Diminished. Their bright circles forever lost
Then lusted for them with the sobbing lust
Of one who seeks their sorrow clinging

Led to the sands of still, forgotten beaches
By the fall and swerve of a softly crying bird
Felt the quick stir and hope of warm wind reaches
Where anger fades and the waves' small consolance is heard.

Published in *The Students' Standard,* 30 March, 1946

Poem

Rain wets and rakes this fretted lawn of sky.
Today the sky is troubled by a clever scythe of wind
Where hawks, like paper, blown are trapped
In angry arcs and loops inside the sky.

So I shall take my troubled love and walk,
Watching the wind drive time before the clouds
Along the black crowd of rocks, into the stars,
Like glass, first mirror like water, like mica

On a rock, thrusting its queen's head, its regalia
Of foam at us. My love, Egypt is with us

While we walk and you are on a cliff
Clean blown by wind whom I would hold
Inside my anxious arms are Egypt's queen
And all your heraldry is dying once again.

The monumental palace, sphinx, rock built, face of man,
The sculptor's unbelievable knife facing the driving rain,

All structure, furrow of cheek and bone, breaking,
Rivulets and rivers on time to an incredible beach
Where like a forgotten pharaoh, dusted and blown
In his wrapped bandage of death, stand all kings
Directing the defense of sand castles in the tide.

A Poem about a Poem about a Poem

one afternoon
all the metaphors in the beehive
broke through their crusts of wax
and spilled over the busy bees
like honey
                stamen parts and pistils
twisted like the tongues of bees
and petals chewed by bee mouths
into balls of rag.
                          At night
the similes which hung from trees
fell down into the grass
and ran across the lawns
toward the bee house.

the images bared their teeth
like dog-stars
                    in his house
of lines and roots
an allegorist paced
observed his shadow
saw his tusks upon the wall.

Poems and Chorus from The Four Winds

For Mimi with all my love

I

A gull screams, winged back and bone
Flung over the wind's back, spray
Of blue-white feather in the rain;
By the sun, under the arch of sky
Sea-race foams, tides of blood roll
Over a hill and river. The arching bird,
The cry, contract into a hand's span,
A spinning sun, a dark eye.

II

As air is spirit so it shapes
The light cyclone of the weather,
Points, circular, the whirling vane,
The mild twisting cock, gathers
The moist sea in a dove-blue bosom
And parades its dragons, camels,
Castles in the sky.

The winds
Gather, the winds, directionless,
Come from their weathers, the winds
Together spin into the thin arena.

As air, light, shatters the leaves
And shadows, so seeds fall, so
Over the hill drifts the dazed feather,
The white spear burning like a sword,
And light air lifts the huge farm
And settles, featured like a garden,
Ground on the concrete city.

And air breathes men into clouds
Whose voice is thunder and whose smile

Lightens the country at four corners
Of the mapped tent, four bearded men:
I hear them breathing over the city,
Over the farm, over the hidden river.

III

Chorus of the Four Winds

East: Early, early in this man's life,
Across a land all water, a rivered land,
The streams flowing in the valley,
The simple cities planned,
Fresh and simple as rain, I ran.

South: Early, early in this man's life,
Under the hover of gulls,
Over the rib and arch of hills,
Heavy and feathered, I flew.

East: Early river, the whimper of water
In the basin

South: bed, nest, in the man's life

East: Green in the garden, my lady Eve,
He said, though I was male
Across the waste of snow

South: Out of the thoughtful mountains
Where the ice glows upon the shoulder
The cold peerless head

East: the flame
Upon the ice, the flame within the ice
That dances on the shattered ridge

Both Winds: Of mountain, bird, river, water,
Of fire, of ice, suddenly the garden

And summertime in this man's life:
What made the wheatfields glad and green
The thrifty bees to sing among the flowers
And the fresh plants to stand amid the falling rain

West: In summer when the rolling year
Wheeled stars across the summer sky,
Amid the stern processional of cloud
Into the day I stepped out of the sun
For whom the land pours gifts:
The brown torch burning in the marsh,
The purple rocket, vetch, the melting buttercup,
The flood of Iris, and the swollen stride of cattle,
Here spice, grape, oak, corn, honey,
The pointed wheat, and seldom seen, the prairie doe,
The hare, and all the summer long the voice
Of creaking earth rolled over on its hinge
Sung by the frog laid low into the drying mud.

Two Winds: Early, early in this man's life

West: Fire
Over the thoughtful mountains
Where the ice glows on the shoulder
The cold peerless head

Two Winds: Fire

West: The wheat bends, and the brown torch
Withers in its flame, and the one bee
Sings all day in the mouth of the Iris,
The sunflower bends. Out of the west

Two Winds: Fire

West: Dark on the dry earth the tanned skin lies
The core is rind, withered in the furrow
The black seed of the apple lies, the winds
Gather

North: Ice

Two Winds: Fire

Four Winds: Early, early in this man's life
Something of this we knew before,
How some would die in sloughs
And some in rivers, how one would lie
Tangled in the marshy weed,
The river's mouth would crack,
The black skin shrivel,
Too early, the wheat not grown, the plant
Dead, the root shrivelled in the earth.

Voice out of the Whirlwind:
Out of the light and out of the dark,
Out of the cloud, and out of the sun in the west,
I spin. I am the dust. Bird, river,
Ice, fire. Out of the furrow.
Whoever planted me sees me grow.
Early in this man's life
I was the simple light, the spinning year,
Let me dance over his grave.

June 1955

Pompilia

He said, "Now you can rest,
be quiet, listen to the geese."
I heard a dog growl once,
a strangled yelp.

He said,
"These are trees, not hands,
no one leans upon the leaves,
the shadow is not blood."

He said, "Night shall come,
accept the mystery,
fall easily into sleep."

He said, "The sea is a cradle,
there will be no more drownings,
even the fish are kind."

I heard armies upon the beach
and saw the razor's tooth,
gleams that died with a death.

In dreams now, a broken wing
and large tree-hands,
two bleeding shadows,
a drowned dog cast on the beach.

Pompilia Outside Rome

I

If I said "hoopla" to the president
    or gargoyles of toothpaste
    or so much for redbrick,
    nothing so imperial

    or, feigning innocence,
    my own hands efficient
    with the keys to the safe

    after the plains burn
    after the summer of Vikings
    when the hordes have gone
    these monuments remain

do you think the walls would tumble down.
    No, I have seen archbishops
    lean as gothic cathedrals
    and a major louder than
    155mm artillery
                    and I say
    these ruins remain

    only inside the poem
    I remarked the grey pouches
    hanging like moneybags
    and that his tongue
    green as a dollar bill
    was deflated
                depression
and whirlwinds over the pain

    when I stumbled from the office
    behind the math-chem-physics bldg
    the sun burned west Edmonton
    and the armies disappeared in smoke

II

grey eminence ruler of dust
a summer of plagues
          sun's shadow
          royal dust
     I pray for burned crops
     skeletons in our fields
     and the tentmakers journey

our youth in the desert
our cities dry
and the grasshopper
under the automobile wheel

Portrait of King David as Moses

In the clay oven where he worked
clay into brick he saw how flame
extorted whiteness from the glaze
that bricked him in. Therefore
he begged the flat egyptian girls
to fold him in their lunatic bright
ways.
So much absurder than a loon
the cackle of this harpist startled
them. They burst, like moths, in flits
and sunders from his tomb, and left him
to his wrists and harping.

A deft god then taught him sleek
egyptian tricks, to don the hawk-
face, wear the beak of avarice,
and ply his strings in better trade
than bricking body in its simple
clay and mortar, so he begged
the Hebrew girls their crooked
favours for a wry and oriental
song.
They therefore brought him
breasts of men long drowned
in reedy pools to hollo in,
and lenten lovers in their weeds
to pluck, and whips of upright men
to sting the tuneful flesh to harmony.

His deft taught wrist therefore extorts
his daily blood. His nightly cry,
absurder than a loon's, hollos
in ovens where the clay is glazed
by fire, where the brick on brick
shuts mortal owner in its simple shape.

Portrait of the Artist as Prairie

In the country of my words' two seasons
There are no others, but only a bare-boned
Winter child of a land, bent by time's rickets,
Crooked and thin as the sides of Alberta,
His slattern mother, and the twin ghost of him
Solid and golden as a wheat grain in a good summer.

In my country's language the two children ride
Forever Siamese and mirror the same pony words of wishes.
By the river where the one goes on his horse of desire
The other goes along, a centaur of a boy in water:
And plump and silver the bare-boned child of winter
Sees in the water the stars of Sheriffs and spends
His bullet nouns to kill the villain time and prison.

In my land's language he begs for penny words
Where speech is not rich and is not spent as silver
But grudgingly given a copper few words at a time
The bronze of admonition, or hard as northern nickel
The hand hoarded language is passed from mouth to mouth.

And in my country's frost speech must be spent for reason
Not toys but ticks of words to cover and to measure
With the odd cross word of rhyme
The quilt and blanket for the forest of time
And those who breathe in ghosts of it
Save speech for the payment of the spirit.

But in my country's time is a summer of language
And a rain of words over the year gulleyed plains
Where stream the furious rivers of sentences
And spills a water of language over the child
There pike-furious for language and fish silver
In the spending of it rides the ghost of the bare boned child
Plump and smiling, stalking child miles over the land
And as the watery rider, part of his golden stallion
Oh on the horizon he flashes flesh past time
To the thunder of hooves in the clouds of fable.

Prologue

Nudity of manner was well thought of,
and stripped desire showed her breast,
the inner pose exposed itself in colour
squeezing gobs of sun and ungowned moon
upon the canvas of our eyes.
                                        Shape-makers
holidayed in bronze and stone whole festivals
of motion, passion of the circling arm,
and merriment of pelvis in the park.
There was much wrist-wresting and voices,
metaphor-makers were in great demand,
and forgers of fiction.
                                Through the land
the unstalked animals walked in pairs
to naming booths.

The Rape of Europa

whatever has been said: it is the absolute protest
        the soul hung in its soot
        shrieks about ugliness

you've no idea about the irrationalities of poetry
I said to my physicist who was examining a mote
in my eye

        though I have been blind for years
        and suffered cataracts of tears
        to wash away this dust

        once I saw

a bull-white sun lift upon his slender horns
the great white cow of the sky

        and bleed away her lust.

Reactionary Song

On our bodies' prosper, the declension of worms
Constructs a new generation, the colour informs,
The crabbed monkey colour which our agony warms.

Delicate as a Japanese print
The Emperors go sailing
In a three ring pattern of stunt
And wailing.

With a magician's instinct for disappearance
And the miracle return,
With the confidence of sailors in appearance,
And the mortician's concern,
They bury us often.

And the new rulers soften
At the light of the horizon in the dawn;
Like a hungry generation they gnaw at the sky
Where the obvious assurance of the sun
That last cherry of evening hangs
On its lips like a lark and a song.

Forever at such altars we light our candles
Between those lands where the currents run too fast
For medial sails we hopefully erect and handle,
Or voyages begun by an auspicious feast.

And grief upon us in an evening rhyme
With shriek on shriek in darkness, drops,
Like the flapping of crows fed too long on Carrion Time.

But the dead atlas continues to support the world
With his forgotten skeleton, an architectural reflex.

A Refusal

the only sin
the sin *against* the body
refusing it
                    why then
how deeply I have sinned
to love your wide gaze
as if it were of paradise
of loves unheard undreamed
of gods who knew not love
as we know love
                                hairy
greek men their moustache
greedy for your hair
are right I'd say are all
that ought to be those goats

listen exec blue stocking 63
I sin by loving your wide eyes
as if they gazed to paradise

as if you didnt know
as if you didnt yearn

when I'd be wise unnatural
and tell you in my voice and vice
of high spiritual things
to think you innocent
whose innocence was love

I wish all you'd looked for
those gone fixed years ago
I think your eyes were looking
for as if you saw doves, loves
gods knew nothing of rapists
or of blind Moroccan eyes
sewn shut or whatever they
do about flies and bugs and things

I wish that dull picture-making
man hadnt fixed you in that gaze
I remember anyhow in my class
when you accepted my own guilt
as if that were
                    well what use
saying now that it was innocence
I loved when it is innocence
my love would take away just
as the rapist on some island
seeing your violent love violate
or some Lebanese lusting for you
took gratuitously whatever he could

Remembrance of Things Past

. . . after the stories
after the campfires
and the stories
stumbling into the daylight
knowing about sun
about the trees
about the gopher
nothing of my people
the stories dwindling
like stars in the dawn
only the storyless sun
and the desert stumps

who was whispering
about peril
who about
journeys
who told us
in the evening
by the flowering stars
by the robed trees

before the rodent sun
before the teeth
of the storyless sun
before the bare stars

wordless
the yellow gophers

Scholars

Bald heads, we
(Yeats said) respectably
Edit and annotate
And uncreate:

Assemble bits,
Devise designs,
Bemuse our wits
Emending lines

(Said he) for this
Have poets rhymed—
For spectral kiss
Grotesquely mimed.

Bald heads, we,
With him, respectably
Expostulate, hesitate,
Read on—and annotate.

Science Fiction

The last man, his great rod in his hand,
crept to the moronic wife who mumbled charms
over the coals that glowed with (numbers here)
and in the rouge of creation (cosmetic for the
lips singing: the croon of dead children)
I saw these prairie images: furnace, and wind
  over the coals, over the hot coal sun.

Second Part of an Unfinished Moral Dialogue

You have taken my name (continued)
        the lawyer with the icy teeth
        and the frostbitten smile

He held the icicle under my nose, waved
the stick forbiddingly
                                        Admit your part
in this general frost, he persisted (the judge
ordered a retraction and the left flank moved
back, exposing the wrecked city
                                                        bare breasted
women threatened me, recoiled from me, held
bodies (children's) like flags before me)

You were seen sowing teeth under the moon

    (fully armed the teeth sprang up, armed
    like the ocean, the wheat bent under the sun,
    the dog barked beside the sun: a cock crew
    fanned its tail in a bravado)

                                                        At this
I sprang out of my fleece, shook golden
fingers: general astonishment, applause.

I have friends in the cave I said
not unwittily, and I wanted neither girls
nor jewels. I want the paint taken off.
I want my eyes to see again what used to be,
my friends melted, sent out of the icy cave,
no wars, inscriptions unwritten again,
the children restored.
                                        The judge stroked
a cloudy moustache (storms) adjusted glasses
(burning cities): I thought he snarled.

The law is pathetic, he said.

Several Other Ways of Getting at the Same Thing

as you say: there we are
there: meaning a loaf or half?
or even the yeast
or simply yesterday
when I was half-baked
in the oven of your burning eyes?

you say: ah yes, so it is
it is: it, the splendour of it
careening like a planet
settles on blown fly-paper
and those spindly stuck legs
pointing north-east and south-west
toward the giant IS of glue and sand

let us be true to one another

true is the it: a planetary beach
    some shadow
                you know the rest

Stroke

Some children shrieked at hopscotch that spring morning
I stooped for a soft beachball at my feet.
A sharp stab in my eye was the first warning:
the purple skyline wavered in the heat.
As the blaring ambulance blurred the landscape, I
lay helpless, my entire right side gone dead.
My mind buzzed round in circles like a fly.
I tried to speak, but my jaw sank like lead.
They fed and bathed and shat me all of June.
One day they told me I'd be walking soon.
I snorted. I'm afraid to go outside,
scared stiff of evenings when old friends drop round:
a minute portion of my brain has died,
I hear Apocalypse in every sound.

Talkative Poem

This is the poem I'll confront directly:
it has said too much.
It has been indiscreet.
It betrayed my friends
and angered and hurt my wife.
How shall I ever silence it?

Do you have no agreement with me
about the nature of honesty?
Do you think anything is permissible?
What shall I do later
when you have written all love out of my life?
Turned me into stone? A noted gossiper?
How shall I live with my silences then?
Or is that your intent?
Finally to silence me?
In the end to live
in your own inscrutability
no longer understood, no longer heard,
known only for your hardness

That Other Time of Year

(set to an old tune)

And I swore we'd out for summer,
Out beyond the farthest bay,
Where the sun strikes hot on morning
And the great gulls greet the day;

Where the fish-stink sands are yellow,
And the water blue as pie:
O I never thought we'd wander
Round the cliff-top till we die.

Yet all scarp and boulder memories
Lacerate the mind, and we,
Running naked on the beaches,
Glance the headland to the sea.

And we never stop to wonder
About swimming's sin or joy,
While the surf is hissing landward,
In to bell the tossing buoy.

O think not that the ocean
Has a bed as good for you
As it had for Captain Ahab
And that damned big white whale, too.

We cannot all be part of myth,
That's reserved for very few,
Gravestone, cromlech, monolith,
Or memory may have to do.

But we all are part of sunlight
And the air which runs as free,
Up the sloping shores to morning,
As the salmon-sprawling sea:

For the sea-shell beaches stretching
Out beyond the farthest bay,
Can but tell the eager swimmers
All they know of summer's day.

Tithonus

To EWM who, being given immortality, turned into a grasshopper.

Scrape, scrape. Well, spindle-shank,
Thou wast not born for death, immortal bore,
And still you rub your belly and you ache for music.

What would you hatch, bald patch?
Another bowl of farmers' plagues for hungry generations?
A year, perhaps, of cities and its moan:
Suburban basements
                    opening on the loam
Of parlous ease in prairie lands forlorn?

To Certain Poets Who Spoke of Vision

Of poetry they know some, more than I
Of how it comes unmused, unbidden:
Words are exhaled from them like a sigh.
They stand knee deep in words while I
Swim in a sea of words and hidden

Half in water, half in air, look back
Into the sea of me and see my arms
My legs, broken by that film of black
And ugly water, turn upon my back
And float a while, safely in a sea of harms.

Tower of Babel

When flood, fire, fever overthrow
This city and the ones I love in it
I dont know that I'll weep for them
Though I might for a minute.

I can despair now.
This seems the time for grief
Before the final hour
When timidities beyond belief
Assemble Babel's tower

And everyone climbs on it
Speaking a language I do not know
Though sometimes when I'm brief
Enough and when I climb with them
I think that I invented it.

Trio in Brass and Season

For Canadian Poets

First Male Figure
O he was shipwrecked in the snow.
Where no ships went he died to go;
Ghost of a fop, pirating the blood
Of paradise; to be a nun's priest
He priest-like was who was impressed
In service of dead kings, to sail the flood
And perjure woman's vanity, and lie, and loot,
And beat his sister's squire, and plot
A fiendish victory against the wholly unreal lot.

Second Male Figure
From unalterable wit of rain
He bailed out a new season of voices
For every fashion—but always
His sad short sturdy stern
Dragged in a current of poems;
Prow up, a whisker of foam
Curled on his fair face,
And his heavy rudder
Turned to a shore
Where sanded on a broad beach
Splayfoot, paddled among, gulls,
Their unbelievable songs.

Female Figure
In fog no less than they she forced to sail
The paper ships but on a deadly sea
She launched atlantic up a graceful wail
Full of the wilting schooners; O wickedly
As they went down
She wept her living tears
To see the paper sailors drown.

Chorus of Unreal Voices
Unholy trio cast in greening brass
Wept by the weather, topped by formless snow,
Accept our laurels, crown your eyes of glass,
Who watched, still, glazed, a frozen time ago.
O you are clasped by elementary calm
In caves of light, statued on those bases, there
Vaulted to innocence, moulding through a psalm
Of years, a cluttered green attitude, a form
Of all our judges, piercing through the glare
Of sunlight, perpetual in the public square.

Variation on Levertov's Peppertrees

I don't even remember if lemon
comes into the poem
yet think of nipple-shapes
while a merry jaundice swims
over the orange landscape

not quite a sunrise
this sandy syrup SUNUP

but why then peppertrees?

Ah, I do have a taste of truth
(a dog followed by a daub
followed by a dog, another daub
and a semi-nude body, three
slashes of broad yellow paint)
out of dear old President Stevens'
symposia: order's the thing

YOU say the tree's gone then
there's no tree among daubs and dogs
but you have forgotten me
and where I sit among the leaves
having got there
                    oh yes there
is where I have excellently
gotten to
            to be a pallette
in the tree or (don't think
I miss your sly objection—
questions curl their tails
around all singing boughs
and swarm among the daubs and dogs)
is it a tree in a pallette?

Palatable and palpable
the tree-bird-song
the lemon evening
dogs and the sun-drop
a nipple on the bosom of the day

The Wizardry of Is

arrived
by no means known but by skills
of craftsmanship, of pity too,
the dogwork
and found only
the blunt stupidity of thorny trees
harrowing
this one like a hurt boy
limping across the yard, and this one,
crippled, his sly hand thrust into my
eye, singing of salvation, the sky
crumpled like an accordion with a moan.

so they scuttled my quest like a Q boat
in 1914 and I roamed for a while in no
man's land, looking at pictures, the face
of pasty fear, the ace of speedboat land,
the marquis of speed.
Everything comes
of a seed, I said to my wife, the flower,
the child, and everything ends in a seed,
the lion floating on our lawn, the tigerish
sun who is planted in earth every night.

Young Man Addresses His Love

The punishment we deliver
Under a silver moon
In spite of all our laughter
Is a comic paper

The peculiar present sin.
Our eyes cup delicately
And admiring lips sip after
Tea garden praises for the daring
Of darling centaurs and a softer
White lady on a horse
Wearing her silver smile.

I have loved you better
For all my soul than words
But Time is no nectar
And the honeyless passion
No flower the bee sways towards.

I would be out of time and fashion
In famous iron the nun sorrow
Of your face, but religion's
No honey, and the bee's at Tomorrow.

And disaster, a mild Claudius,
Pours poison tea in our ears,
Whispering sin in our faces.

All move in the moonlight
Until in Time's flower,
Star, centaur, and lady,
And every white horse is a tear.

Zenith: Saving to Disk

This poem will be saved
a saved poem can not be made up out
of lines that will not remain
invisible or words that wont
dissolve—the illusion will
at last become the reality

or will it become real because
it has become print and not
these ghostly flickering
figures on a screen

figures on a screen
illusions dreams
of words dreamt by me:

the absence of my self
the absent self who writes
the ghostly writing self

the ghost writer

dreaming his own holocaust
himself the victim and his own
executioner

[Computer poem on Zenith 148, Draft Three]

NOTES to VOLUME 2

[Editors' comments in brackets.]
Mandel's comments indented.

Third Person Singular

[Mandel, with Esther Gudjonson and Antony Thorne—the other poets whose work appeared here—wrote a Foreword to the volume:]

> This work presents song and lyric as in poetry and has as its subjects those things which are the rightful subjects of song and lyric. It is not designed as wisdom or reason or logic but rather to fulfill the use of poetry as we see it, which is certainly, if nothing else the presentation of human experience in an organized form. The meaning of our work lies in that as well as in any statement or theme applicable to the poems.
>
> These poems are in the tradition of modern American and English poetry, reflecting the cosmopolitan view, related in some small extent to the metaphysical poetry of today but they are primarily romantic in spirit and treatment. As such they represent the view that reality is achieved and understood by the individual as a creative being. They emphasize those aspects of reality which adhere to the individual in isolation as well as his social context.
>
> The romantic in poetry believes that the individual will succeed, if he can, only by his understanding of those things which are closest to him as an individual; such things being love, death, the desire and need for communication and the search for faith. If his poetry or any poetry has a public function (which we believe it has) this is the function; poetry brings understanding or belief in those things. Because it is song or lyric or poetry, people go to it; otherwise it fails, both in purpose and as poetry.

Crusoe

[Dedication: "This is for Peggy and Dennis / in the dark wood, a way."]

Dreaming Backwards [Initial title: *The Blue Men of Saskatchewan*]

[Dedication: "To Eva, my mother, and to all my fathers." Mandel was fascinated with ancestral memory. His parents emigrated to Canada from the Ukraine. His father, Charles Mandel (1893-1956), was born near Kiev. His mother, Eva (Berner) Mandel (1898-1955), was born in Odessa. "(T)o all my fathers…" refers to the poets of the English tradition. In the mid-1980s, Mandel visited the Ukraine, the area around Kiev, looking for the village where his father had been born. He was informed, on mentioning the name of the village to a guide, that "hundreds" of places bore that name. For Mandel, the dedication was an acknowledgement of a plurality of fathers; the anecdote suggests diaspora, the scattering/multiplication/refraction of the father's name, which, to be Freudian, is also linked to images of the feminine.]

Uncollected/Unpublished Poems

Cabbages and Trees [Alternate title: "Cost of Living"]

The Mermaid

There was a glorious painting of a sunflower in that room where I wrote the poems: against a gold-red background a most curious flower, with a gold-red centre and a white collar. And oddly a line from *Moby Dick* kept running through my mind: "the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all." (I always type id, by the way, instead of is).

Portrait of King David as Moses. [Initial title: "Masochist."]

Tower of Babel

[Alternate version of third stanza: "Which rises downward / Like a dim reflection."]

The Wizardry of Is

I don't know where the images of this one originate, but they are also film-images, montages.

Zenith: Saving to Disk

Computer Poem on Zenith 148/Draft three.

[In the mid-1980s, Mandel experimented with "computer poems," intrigued by the possibility of letters as "not real…not really there…illusions."]

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Eli Mandel, ca. 1979
photo courtesy Ann Mandel

Eli Mandel (1922–1992) was born in Estevan, Saskatchewan, and grew up in Estevan and in Regina. He served overseas with the Canadian Army Medical Corps from 1943 to the end of the war, remaining in England after the war to attend Khaki University. Returning to Canada in 1946, he entered the University of Saskatchewan, where he earned his B.A. (1949) and M.A. (1950).

He completed his Ph.D. at the University of Toronto in 1957, then, having taught at Collège Militaire Royale de St. Jean for four years, joined the faculty of the University of Alberta, where he remained until 1967. From 1967 to his retirement in 1986 he taught at York University in Toronto. *An Idiot Joy*, his fourth collection of poetry, won the Governor-General's Award in 1967, one of many awards he received for his outstanding contribution as writer, critic, editor, and anthologist to Canadian life and literature.

Judy Chapman, who was born in Estevan, Saskatchewan, has a degree in Educational Psychology from the University of Regina, where she teaches and coordinates First Year Services.

Andrew Stubbs teaches in the English Department at the University of Regina. He was a student of Eli Mandel at York University, where he earned a Ph.D. in Canadian Literature.

Eli Mandel was a small man from a small town in Saskatchewan, but he had a huge intellect and a great passion for poetry, one that goes far beyond any borders. There are few contemporary poets who show such wisdom and verbal artistry. Eli was brilliantly "out of place," never allowing himself an easy comfort inside language. Instead he challenged who he thought he was, what he knew, and what he remembered to create a poetics and major body of work that is remarkable in its variety and craft. His bravery and vulnerability, his stance that you must risk all of yourself in the writing of a poem, and his aesthetic achievement have had a profound effect on the poets who have followed him. We are blessed that no matter where he went in his life, he came from here, and his poems return to teach us.

—*Lorna Crozier*

Before Eli Mandel we wrote prairie poems without quite being prairie poets. Eli showed us how to commit ourselves to being poets of our very special time and place. He refused to live his life separate from his own versions of speech, his personal landscapes, his history or histories, his shape-shifting ideas, his relationships to friends and strangers. Eli Mandel insisted that our poetry must be integral to our being in the world, and with that huge gesture he gave us an opening sentence that does not end.

—*Robert Kroetsch*

ISBN 0-88977-138-3

9 780889 771383

Canadian Plains Research Center
[illegible] 2 volumes, [illegible] ISBN 0-88977-[illegible]